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THE TOWER GARDENS.

A Novel.

BY

LIZZIE ALLDRIDGE,

AUTHOR OF "BY LOVE AND LAW;" "THE WORLD SHE AWOKE IN;" "THE OLD ABBOT'S ROAD," &c.

"Now was there made, fast by the Touris wall,
A garden fair."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE TOWER GARDENS.

CHAPTER I.

JESSIE.

IT was the night of the seventh of April. Jessie Bayliss had drawn up a little round table so near to the fire that it was a marvel its one mahogany leg did not ignite; it was already rough with minute blisters, the result of many scorchings.

On that little round table was an elderly black straw hat, some weather-worn black velvet and sundry bows of crape, soft with age.

The crape, as a trimming, had had its day, and a long one too. Its owner had just been using it to rub up the velvet with which it had shared eighteen months of very hard

wear, in the rains and mists of the North Countrie.

Out of these unpromising materials Jessie had been trying for some time to make a new and beautiful covering for one of the prettiest heads to be found on the Scotch side of the Western Borders—her own.

She had made several attempts. She possessed, or thought she possessed, a masterful way with such things; but to-night that gift failed her. Alison, her cousin, having succumbed to a bad cold, was in bed and asleep; Jessie had no one else to encourage her, no one to admire her cunning devices, to sympathise with her failures, to urge her to try again; no one to talk to, to laugh at; so she pulled her work to pieces, stuck her long needle into the solitary reel of black cotton, and turned shivering to the fire.

It was a bitter night.

The toes of Jessie's slippers were scorching, but to get warm all over was impossible; and Jessie's fire was not built up with customary Birrendale generosity.

It was April by the calendar; in London, in the Tower Gardens, the lilacs were in bud; in Birrendale it was winter then, as it had been for nearly six long months.

I almost wish Jessie had not turned away

from the lamp-light when she did, because you might have seen her features a little better then; and they were distinctly worth looking at.

But perhaps it was as well; poor child, she was not at her brightest that night! Who could be while the wind was howling round the house like a pack of famishing wolves, with a fierce dismal sound that brought to mind only too vividly that other more terrible wolf that Jessie knew, only too surely, was already sniffing about the door of her own home?

Jessie shuddered and sighed.

"Once before, when I was a little girl, I had the same dreadful, eerie feeling that haunts me now so often, whenever I hear that noise," she said to herself. "Aye! but it's dreary, dreary, dreary! Oh, if that river would only leave off rushing and tearing on these rough nights! If that wind would only leave off howling! I never can help thinking of my father being drowned! It brings back all that awful time so horribly! What is going to be the end of this?—it can't go on! We shall all be dead soon, if it lasts much longer." And she looked into the fire very sadly.

It was Jessie's part to supply brightness in that desolate household, and for the most part

she supplied it liberally. As a rule her brightness was as natural and spontaneous as a sunbeam's, but to night it had died down; she had not enough for herself, and none for other people.

"Auntie's all alone, I must go to her, I suppose," she thought; but to go to her seemed a very disagreeable duty.

"She doesn't need me," she said. "She won't speak a word to me. She will only make me more eerie. Well, I must go! Duty's duty! I hope Alison's cold will be better tomorrow. I really must have some one to talk to! Ah!" and instead of rising to go to her aunt, she bent nearer the fire—"Ah! Mac Carruthers! I suppose you're enjoying yourself finely in the sunny south!" she went on, addressing a young man who was often in her thoughts, and just then in her mind's eye. "How I should like to be in a warm place, where the sun shines!—or—I don't think I could be very miserable anywhere with Mac Carruthers;" this last sentence, however, came from a different part of her consciousness than any of her previous thoughts, and it made her smile, which she did freely upon the least provocation. And it also made her linger over the fire.

She certainly had the most exquisite

mouth! She always had had; even as a child everyone had wanted to kiss it. The mouth itself was sweetly, beautifully drawn, delicately modelled, sensitive to the slightest emotion; now bending with a smile into free and winning curves, now straightening into a wistful pathos, but always beautiful and very tempting.

A thought made Jessie blush deeply; she raised a hand to her cheek and lightly touched that blush with her finger tips, as if to brush it away. Then she sighed; but it was quite a different sigh from any that had within the last hour gone before it.

"And to think how that fellow's enjoying himself!" she said. "I'm certain he's enjoying himself, and I'm —sh-o-o—sh-o-o—shivering!"

She couldn't quite make out whether she saw in the fire a grand foreign *table d'hôte*, such as she had read about, or an equally splendid foreign ball-room.

"But whichever it is," she went on after a while, "I can be certain as to what he's doing: flirting, of course."

A dozen different thoughts and feelings went with the words.

"And I'd be flirting, too, if I had the chance, I suppose," she added, presently. "That is, I

don't 'suppose,' I *know*. After all, what does it mean? Only that one likes to amuse and be amused. Well, then comes the question, whether—whether?"—the pause and thoughts not to be put into words. "Falling in love must be—is—why something very different, something very awful. I ought to know what it is. Poor, poor, sweet, dear little mother! I ought to know!" she said, solemnly, and with a shudder, that was not all due to the bitter cold. "Ah me! Ah me! why do I keep thinking of her—of her and of my father so much to-night? It is that dreadful rushing, roaring of the Birren! Oh! if it would only cease. I must go and look after Auntie. But, I wonder, now, I can't help wondering, what Mac's doing. Yes, I think, do you know I rather like poor old Mac! And he? Oh! I'm only one among half-a-hundred by this time! 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder'—of somebody else. Very true, but supposing there isn't somebody else to grow fond of, or only the Boy Baird, what then? No, I can't stand that howling wind any longer. It wails so for the poor drowning people. Oh!" with a sudden cry of grief, "it's the seventh of April, the day my father was drowned! I must go!—I must go!"

She sprang up, hurriedly put out the candle,

and noiselessly opening the bedroom door, went into the passage that ran through the house. It was dimly lighted by one small benzoline lamp. She flew along the corridor, frightened by all sorts of vague terrors. The Dale's people said the glen below that house was haunted. Her own shadow, large and ghostlike, caught her up, passed her, went before her on the wall. She ran on, scarcely daring to breathe.

In the hall, at the end of the corridor, where burned another small, cheap lamp, might partially be seen a squatting Indian idol, sundry swords and other war-like trophies, and a couple of hats that had once belonged to Jessie's uncle, the late Captain James Bayliss, her father's brother.

She rushed across the hall and into the dining-room, which, although well furnished in modern light oak, looked to her unspeakably desolate.

Her aunt, Mrs. Bayliss, a pale-haired woman with a wind-spoiled complexion, dressed in the grimmest widow's weeds, was sitting near the fire, looking over papers. She always made the place seem desolate; but she was, at any rate, a living person; that was something to Jessie. Any living person was better than those ghostly shadows.

"How is Alison?" Mrs. Bayliss asked, without looking up; there was that on her heart that made it impossible for her to face her niece.

"Asleep," returned Jessie, seating herself on the little stone wall that bounded the tiled hearth, and shivering with cold and a nameless dread.

"Then no doubt she'll be better to-morrow," said Mrs. Bayliss, turning the page of a letter.

"I'm sure I hope so," said Jessie, "I'm wretched without her."

Mrs. Bayliss, Alison's mother, made no further remark; but went on with her papers for some time.

"I expect the last little calf will be dead before the morning," she said, presently, in a tone of calm despair.

Jessie said nothing, but she felt a strange—no, not at all strange, only too common—a soreness about her heart.

"Everything dies here. We shall be dead soon," she said, half under her voice. Mrs. Bayliss heard the remark, but made no reply; she knew it was only too probable.

Out of doors the wind howled like a whole starving menagerie; within Jessie and her aunt sat in most oppressive silence for some time.

"If you wrote to uncle John—to your brother, Mr. John Harbuckle—don't you think he would help us, Auntie? I'm quite sure he would—and be glad of the chance," Jessie ventured at last to say. She had been wanting to say this for several days past.

Mrs. Bayliss rose—went to the mantelshelf and gazed steadily at a large coloured photograph of the late Captain in his uniform.

Then she turned and looked down at her niece on the stone coping of the hearth.

"Jessie," she said, with bitter emphasis, "my brother John, like the rest of the kind people, will be very glad to help us—*in his own way.* They'd see us starve sooner than help us in our way."

"Because they know it would be no good, Auntie," said Jessie, dropping her voice. "It would only be throwing more money into the sea."

"When you are a widow, my dear, it will be time for you to advise widows; not before," continued Mrs. Bayliss, emphatically, her voice hard with intense emotion. "Your mother, Jessie, would not have blamed me—she was a widow, and *she knew.*"

Jessie was effectually quelled.

She sat in silence until the clock struck ten,

and then vanished to her own room, sad, lonely, and shivering.

By a rather strange coincidence, as events showed on that night, Jessie dreamed, when warmed with sleep, that she was walking along some well-remembered shore, by a placid sea, with her mother, who had now been dead more than seven years. She had dreamed of her many and many a time before, but always had awakened in distress; for, hitherto, that mother's face had come to her full of the same terrible look of bewildered anguish it had worn during the awful months that had elapsed between the day on which Jessie had last seen her father and her mother's own death.

That night, in her dream, Jessie and her mother both walked quietly hand in hand, as they had done on summer holidays long ago, and Jessie, without any fear, looked up into her mother's face.

The mother smiled gently and was gone.

Jessie awoke—for a moment, calm and happy as she used to be when a child at home, before the dreadful days came.

"Thank God I have seen you happy once more, dear!" passed through her heart and brain. "Thank God, I have seen your smile again."

But she opened her eyes. The placid summer waves were gone; the room was full of cold moonlight; the ravening wind was still unsatisfied; the angry stream was still tearing wildly down to the Solway.

CHAPTER II.

KNOWE FARM.

AMONG the rounded hill tops that gently rise above the Scotch bank of the Solway is an eminence of so peculiar a form that it has become a land mark for the whole country side it dominates.

With massive squareness and broad flat summit it stands out bold and abrupt above the soft and graceful curves of a low range, like a gigantic rampart or colossal earthwork made by man rather than by nature. I will call it Mount Agricola; for the Romans, who always knew a good site, fortified this great mound; and even now, in a solemn, grey twilight, when the stern green hill is dark as the stem of a spruce fir, it requires but a slight effort of the imagination to see a ghostly sentry still on duty among the mists that hang around its head.

That broad flat head is the highest ground for many a mile around. From it, on a clear summer day, when the wild thyme is bloom-

ing and the sheep are browsing on the hill side, one may see more counties, English and Scotch, than I care to mention. It looks over a lovely borderland, all fertile dales and green or wooded hills, following each other, in a seemingly endless succession, in great wave-like lines; as if a tumbling sea, without losing its form, had been changed into solid earth.

Down from those hills wander numberless little burns, that fall into larger streams as those streams hasten to join a swift river rushing to meet the Solway, before that Solway's tide has all run out to the great ocean, that is shining in the far distance like the dove in the Psalms, covered with silver wings and her feathers like gold.

One of the streams that run down to the Solway is the Birren Water, and it was in Birrendale that Mrs. Bayliss and the girls lived.

This is how they came to be there.

About four years and a half before the date of that April evening when Jessie talked to herself over the fire, two men were walking by the side of a salmon pool in the Birren. It was an exceptionally beautiful autumn afternoon, there was a sound of rushing water in the distance, but the deep pool was very still;

the heavily wooded banks were only yet touched here and there with gold and brown. On one side of the water, long branches dipped into the stream; on the other, tall firs, straight as cathedral columns, dwarfed the men who were walking between the great trees, and a bank, that would have been but one tangle of fern, bramble and meadow sweet, had not the old red sandstone cropped up here and there, supplying the needful drawing that made confusion picturesqueness.

All was very still and solemn; the bright sunlight that was fast ripening the oats on the uplands beyond the woods could hardly penetrate through the great boughs of silver fir over head.

The two men went on for some little distance in silence, at length one spoke.

"A fine fish, but he just broke me!" he said, dolefully. "I'll not sleep to-night for thinking of him!"

The younger man, Captain James Bayliss, had already heard this lament a dozen times or more. He was tired of it.

"Lucky beggar you to have no more serious trouble to keep you awake!" he replied, in a tone conveying the impression that his thoughts and words were far apart.

"Well, your sleep ought to be sweet enough

after that unexpected windfall!" retorted the other, as if slightly wounded by his companion's unsympathetic tone.

"That's just it!" said Bayliss, "it is that windfall that won't let me rest."

"Aye!" threw in Major Johnstone. (There are a great many Johnstones about the Western Border; they and the Maxwells had a civil war of their own of very respectable dimensions in the days of Queen Elizabeth—of James the Sixth, I should say, there is no Queen Elizabeth in Scotland.)

"The question constantly agitating me now, is, how to invest that money to the very best advantage," continued Captain Bayliss, with a curious mixture of anxiety and self-importance in his tone.

Here they turned from the bank of the stream and took a rough brae-side path, beyond which a burn merrily trickled down over masses of red rocks to the river the two men had just left.

"Ah! happy thought! I know where we can get some tea!" exclaimed Major Johnstone, as Captain Bayliss paused, as if waiting for his friend's advice "this is Mackenzie's place."

"You don't say we're on private grounds?" said Bayliss, who was then paying his first

visit to Birrendale, "I thought we were at least a hundred and fifty miles from tea and civilization."

They turned a corner of the woodland path and came suddenly upon a small plateau above the river and the banks.

Here, in the full sunshine, was a carefully kept lawn, where the children, in Japanese hats with great red bows, were playing croquet. Beyond the lawn was a broad drive and a red sandstone house, all ground floor.

"What a delightful bungalow! the very place I've been dreaming of!" exclaimed Bayliss, very much awake all at once.

Two of the children, a boy and a girl, catching sight of the Major's well-known figure, ran up to him.

"Where's the fish? We saw you playing him! We saw you, but you didn't see us; you were too busy to look up. Has Muir taken him home?" asked the girl.

"He just broke me and got away!" said the Major, shaking his head ruefully; "and we've nothing but a dozen herling and five wee trout, and never a fish at all."

"Arn't trout fish?" asked the boy, a little southern visitor.

The girl laughed and the Major laughed.

"A salmon's a fish here! Why, don't you

know that? You don't know anything!" said the girl.

"Will your mother have some tea for us?" asked Major Johnstone.

"Yes, I know she will. But it's our turn to play now. so we must go," and off ran the children.

The men went to the drawing-room window; it was open, several ladies were within—tea was going on.

The men refused the invitation to enter; they stood by the window lamenting their ill luck. The ladies gave them tea in cups on which were painted sprays of purple heather. Captain Bayliss, who was English, noticed among the sugar at the bottom of his cup a Scotch thistle, with which national emblem the cosy over his hostess's tea-pot was also adorned.

While Major Johnstone was finishing his little chat with the ladies, Captain Bayliss turned his back to the window for a minute or two, and looked at the view of stream and wood, visible through a carefully cut opening among the trees. The mingling of clear, crisp air and warm autumn sunshine, through which he saw it all, made it seem to him quite perfect, for "Autumn," as the poet says, "is Scotch."

"What a sweet spot! What an exquisite picture of refined domesticity!" James Bayliss exclaimed, as he and the Major moved off between great banks of rhododendron towards a country road. Alas! alas! for the poor Captain, his doom was sealed.

"Aye," assented the Major. "It's just perfect!"

"The fact is," said Bayliss, uneasily, as if about to make an admission that was open to criticism, "I'm looking out for a place myself."

"Mackenzie will be leaving soon. His uncle's dead, and he succeeds to the Nithsdale property," said Johnstone, with a backward turn of his head to indicate emphatically the owner of the grounds they were going through.

"Is he? Then I'll take it," exclaimed Bayliss, "if it's anywhere within my range."

"Well, I'll be glad of you for a neighbour. You'll find plenty of old Indians round about here," said Johnstone.

"The fact is," and Bayliss paused, "*I'm going in for farming.*"

The Major stopped short, and stared aghast.

"The man's daft!" he cried.

"I never was saner in my life," returned Bayliss, somewhat nettled.

"Never saner! Then it's a wonder they've

let you be at large so long," retorted Johnstone.

"What do you mean, Johnstone?" demanded Bayliss, with rising temper.

"Mean? I mean that if you need to get rid of your money, just pitch it into yon salmon pool, but don't——"

"But, my dear fellow, I've gone into the thing thoroughly; I've been studying it for some time now. I've worked it all out to a nicety. It must pay if it's properly managed; it can't fail! Eggs, three farthings a dozen; butter, sixpence a pound; fowls, two-pence ——"

"Ho! ho! That's your line, is it? Then I know what you've been reading. I'd lay an even bet your portmanteau's crammed full of pamphlets. Put that trash into the fire!"

"Trash! But I mean to carry it out," cried Bayliss, with considerable temper.

"Then you're a gone coon, as sure as ever that fish broke me to-day! By the way, when we had that long palaver at the club, last spring, I thought you told me you were going in for art; for art—and, if my memory serves me, for literature?"

"Well," said Bayliss, with hesitation; "yes," they were upon the high road by this time, "yes, and I'm going in for art

still. I had some first-rate lessons last winter in Paris; and I've just begun a portrait of my wife, that everyone says is quite a striking likeness; really, I don't see that art need interfere with farming."

"And the literature?"

"I don't mind admitting I dropped some money there," said Bayliss, with evident reluctance.

"You don't mean to say you bought a newspaper?" exclaimed the Major.

"Why, no; it wasn't quite so bad as that; I was not quite so far left to myself. I—hem!—I worked up some of my own Indian experiences into a novel, and——"

"Hasn't the same thing been done before?" asked Major Johnstone, without waiting for the close of the sentence. "Didn't Grey, and long Jim Smith, and MacArthur, and several others, attempt something of the sort?"

"Yes, but not just in my way, I fancy. Seriously, though, I can't help believing that my book would have been a great success, only, you see, so few publishers know India as we know it."

"True! but perhaps they know the British public rather better. So you published on your own account?"

"I paid for the publishing, certainly; and

then the beggar bolted, by Jove! and I lost my money, book and all. I've cut literature."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Yes, I've cut literature altogether, although I've a Manual of Fortification seething in my brain that's really too good to be lost to the Service. But there, I won't think of it; I'll strangle it! My mind now is wholly given to farming. My wife has long fancied she could manage a farm; now I've this little bit of money to lay out, I should be a brute if I didn't get her one."

"Still a model husband?"

"My wife says so."

"Well, she ought to know! Now here's a Birrendale farm. How do you think Mrs. Bayliss would like to live in that white-washed house with the drab window frames?"

"Of course I don't mean that sort of thing. We should live, say, at the place we have just left."

"Then you think Mrs. Bayliss wouldn't care to come out in that yard in the depth of winter and slice turnips for a couple of dozen cows? The people here all work early and late, live hard, and only just make both ends meet."

"Ah, but I am going to bring modern

science to bear upon it," said Captain James Bayliss, knitting his brows with great energy.

"You won't beat the science of a Birrendale farmer, depend upon that; why, yon barley-field was a moss a dozen years ago! But, joking apart, Bayliss, think of your wife and those two very nice girls, and don't, there's a good fellow, don't turn farmer! Unless, indeed, you're positively *anxious* to die penniless; in which case the farm will enable you to do so very comfortably."

As well might Major Johnstone have attempted to reason a young man out of a wished-for marriage as Captain Bayliss out of a new hobby.

Before many months had passed, James Bayliss, for the time being the happiest man in the world, was the owner of Cauldknowe, that charming place where they had had those insidious cups of tea, and also of the Knowe farm adjoining.

The Major shook his head when his friend told him of his purchase.

"Well, Bayliss, if you *will* cut your own throat you *must*," he said; "but I am sorry mine should have been the hand that passed you the razor."

James Bayliss and Mary his wife both agreed that if a thing was worth doing at all,

it was worth doing well. Cauldknowe was to be the first really settled home they had had in all their married life, for hitherto they had been moving about at duty's call; but now the Captain had retired from the Service and they were free to make a home for themselves. Their goods and chattels were but few, which was, they thought, fortunate, as it gave them an excellent opportunity of putting entirely new furniture into Cauldknowe; and, as every one knows, furniture is now very much better than it was at the time James and Mary Bayliss were married; besides which, the Captain rather prided himself on his artistic culture, and was glad of the opportunity of displaying the progress he had recently made in decorative art.

So they spent a good deal of money upon Cauldknowe.

Then the Knowe farm had been, the Captain thought, much neglected. It required fresh draining, new steading, fresh and expensive machinery, before modern science could be effectually brought to bear upon it.

So they spent a great deal of money upon the Knowe farm.

Spending money was still a new luxury to them: they enjoyed it very much, more than

they had ever enjoyed anything before, since their honeymoon.

There was a brief time in the lives of James and Mary Bayliss, and the girls, Alison, their daughter, and Jessie, their niece, during which they lived in an earthly paradise; there was one brief Scottish summer, one glorious Scottish autumn, when all was radiant with happiness and hope; a few months that in retrospect seemed as absolutely perfect as a sunny day in Birrendale.

And then came steady failure.

The winter snowed them up for many a week together; the spring was black and desolate; summer, long waited for, came not; in antumn there was rain, and rain, and rain. The fields of ripe oats, the delicious fragrance of which had helped to lure the Captain to his ruin, gave place to acres of soddened stalks beaten down and discoloured by the tempest. It was October before the little that remained of the drowned hay could be got in; but that fatal year was only the beginning of sorrows. Let us draw a veil over the miserable details.

Far better would it have been if James and Mary Bayliss had thrown the legacy into the salmon pool, by whose still depths it had been so blissful to sit together on summer evenings,

while the girls made posies of blue-bell and meadowsweet, than to have sunk, not only their money, but themselves, in that all-devouring farm, that "daughter of the horse-leech," that cried for ever, "Give! give!" but gave them nothing in return.

It was a heart-rending failure. Of course, everyone except themselves knew it must prove so; but the more they lost on the farm the more desperately they clung to it.

The poor Captain, although he had no knowledge of farming, had plenty of theories, which, in spite of the ruin they brought on him, he cherished with the affection of a parent for his sickly offspring. He had always something new to try, and, at last, on one of his men objecting to use a new reaping machine, different from any he had ever met with, Captain Bayliss took the machine in hand himself, and was so badly injured that after many weary weeks of suffering and prostration, he was at last convinced that he had been wrong all the way through.

But it was too late, then, for he was on the point of leaving, not only his farm, but this world altogether, before he fully realised how complete had been his failure.

He turned his face away from his wife, who

was sitting by his bed-side, trying hard to keep back her tears, and he moaned :

"A failure, Mary, a dead failure ; but not such a failure as I am myself. All the way through I've been a failure!"

Mary could control herself no longer :

"No, no! dearest," she sobbed, passionately. "In your love to me there's been no failure, never, never dear! In your care for the girls there's been no failure, never, never once! And—and—oh James!—James!—we've been so happy—and I've been so proud of you—so proud! Ah, you'll never know how proud—I've been—and—and—I always shall be!"

He feebly turned his head, stretched out his left hand to her, for his right one was so mangled he could not lift it.

"Is it so, love?" he asked, with a faint smile; and again Mary sobbed out her pride in him.

So, in spite of all, that wail, "So proud of you, so proud!" were the last earthly sounds that bore any distinct meaning to the failing senses of poor James Bayliss.

"John," said the widow to her brother, an old bachelor, who lived in Trinity Square, Tower Hill, when he urged her to return to town with him after the funeral, "John, the

carrying out of my lost darling's plans is the sacred duty to which I devote my life!"

"Mary, it's sheer ruin," said John Harbuckle gravely, firmly, but kindly.

"I cannot be more ruined than I am. I have lost all in losing him," returned Mary, in a tone of quiet, resolute desperation, "I devote my life to the furtherance of his wishes."

"But you admit that at last he saw his mistake," John said.

"I admit nothing that would in any way reflect upon the clearness of his judgment. If the world thinks he was mistaken, it must be my life's work to show the world he was *not*," retorted the widow.

The heroism of which speech so touched the heart of the bachelor brother that he actually supplied her with more money to throw after what had already been lost, and returned to town trusting, he said, to time and what that would do for her.

Away from the sight of her grief, John Harbuckle was able to look at the matter from a business point of view; therefore during the next eighteen months he exchanged very few letters with his sister in Birrendale.

Mary understood what that meant; she ceased writing to him at all.

Alison and Jessie had a dreadful time of it with Mrs. Bayliss.

"I wonder sometimes," said Jessie, often and often, "whether Auntie means to throw us to the wolves, too! Whenever the wind howls, which is nearly always, I can hear them. I don't want to be thrown to them, do you, Alie?"

"I won't be!" was invariably Alison's resolute answer.

"You won't be! Oh, but Auntie always has her way."

"That will have to come to an end some day; but I can't bear the idea of having to fight her. Perhaps I shouldn't, only, you know, there's you, Jessie. We must get mother to do what Uncle John wishes."

Then the girls determined to seize an opportunity of talking to Mrs. Bayliss on the subject, but Alison, succumbing to a terrible cold, Jessie made the attempt alone, and was consequently signally defeated.

"Wait till you are widows yourselves, before you take upon you to advise a widow!"

That was all the girls would both together have been able to extort from Mrs. Bayliss.

"And as neither of us are even engaged yet

there is every probability that we shall be starved to death, long before we have time to get married," said Jessie, when she told Alison of Mrs. Bayliss's remark.

It was on the night of the seventh of April Mrs. Bayliss made this remark. When Jessie returned to her room she had found Alison awake, and had told her of it, before she went to sleep and dreamt that blessed dream, in which once more she saw her own mother's smile. But even the memory of that brief glimpse of warmth and happiness could not prevent Jessie from shuddering in the bitter cold of the Northern winter.

CHAPTER III.

ALONE.

IT was the evening of the seventh of April, the evening on which Jessie Bayliss had sat over the fire in her bed-room at Cauldknowe, scorching the toes of her slippers and talking to herself about many things, most of them sad.

Against this date in the mental note-book John Harbuckle carried about with him, he wrote, sometime afterwards:

"The day of the Upheaval."

The day of the Upheaval had already been an eventful one for John Harbuckle, the brother of Mary, widow of the late Captain James Bayliss.

Early in the morning he had, by the merest chance, been present at the very moment when the workmen who were digging for the foundation of a large public building to be erected near his own house, had struck upon what he was certain must prove to be part of a bastion of old London Wall.

Such a thing does not happen every day:

"Our friend, Woolcomb," John Harbuckle afterwards said, in describing the scene to a common acquaintance, "our friend Woolcomb was on the spot five minutes later: but, unfortunately, as I think, he was unable to take my point of view. I am afraid I somewhat wounded his feelings by the very decided tone in which I expressed my opinions. Indeed toward evening, the conviction that I had hurt him became so strong that I gave up my dinner with the Trinity Brethren and devoted a couple of hours to writing him a few lines. I felt I owed him an apology; and I fancy, too, that, on mature consideration, I was enabled to put my case in a more convincing manner than had been possible during the heat of argument. Woolcomb received my apology in the kindest manner, although I failed to win him to my views. That, however, is of comparatively little moment; our friendship remains not only unimpaired but is stronger than ever, I am thankful to say. At my age we cannot afford to lose a friend; it is so difficult to find a new one."

John Harbuckle, on the evening of that eventful day, was sitting at a large table which was covered with books, absolutely engrossed in writing what he was pleased to

call, without any sense of the humour of the thing, "a few lines."

An Argand burner, with a shade that once had been red but had now faded down to a tone most lovely to an artistic eye, threw a disk of brightness upon its owner's paper and helped the fire to give to the room a dim but pleasant light.

The room was large and very full, being much crowded by old family furniture as well as by the innumerable articles John Harbuckle was continually bringing home and putting down anywhere.

It was an apartment difficult to classify. Clearly it was no drawing-room, for it contained a large dining-table and dinner-waggon, both, however, now loaded with a heavy meal, composed entirely of books and papers, and preventing the use of either the terms, drawing-room or study, although there were books enough in it to form a considerable library. It was, in fact, the "den" of the old bachelor of fifty-three, who was then writing those "few lines" to his brother antiquary.

John Harbuckle's den! What have I said? Why every individual hair of its owner's scanty locks would have risen with horror, could he have heard the words! What, call the dear room where his grandparents and

parents, his brothers and sisters and his own youthful self had lived, and in which some, including his own youthful self, had died—a den? Profanity!

Ah! the young birds had flown away, the old ones had been buried, but to its solitary occupant that room was a *nest* still; his home now as it had always been.

Built somewhere about the time of our illustrious first George one might say it was. There were three long, narrow windows flush with the outside of the wall, and each window had a deep settle and panels carved with wreathen work; being, it was said, by Grinling Gibbons.

On each side of a mantel-piece of the same period were two large arm-chairs, showing unmistakable signs of long and hard wear. They were tenantless now, standing empty, facing each other, where for many a year John Harbuckle's parents had used them. The last occupier, the mother of the elderly man at the table, had died in one of them, about two years ago. Her son had never yet allowed that sacred chair to be used; he never used it himself.

She was eighty-four when she died. Her son had been a tender nurse to her for many years.

The uncertain light from the fire and the

shaded lamp, half revealed a good many old portraits on the walls, notably John Harbuckle's paternal grandmother, a lady of majestic presence and powerful features, delicately arrayed as a shepherdess, and her sister-in-law with a wreath of ripe wheat and an airy arrangement of spotted gauze, as the goddess Ceres; it having been the fashion in the remote times in which they were painted, always to represent a person as somebody else, by way of enabling friends the more easily to recognise the likeness.

A pair of card tables, once the property of the shepherdess, occupied the recesses behind the arm-chairs; the shepherdess smirked forcibly over one, while her husband, as Lord Mayor, with his massive official gold chain, maintained a dignified composure above the mantel-piece, on which a clock, in a mahogany case with a roof in the shape of a pagoda, ticked as if in a desperate hurry to get to the end of all time.

But had John Harbuckle, a man of fifty-three, no companions except the portraits of ancestors more or less remote, and the photographs of Mary Bayliss and the girls which stood on the mantel-piece? Surely children and grand-children should have been his surroundings; and, indeed, might have been,

but for a circumstance that took place about twenty-four or five years before that evening.

That circumstance having occurred, John Harbuckle was now a bachelor; with a memory—certainly, with an ideal attachment; certainly also—but the memory (well, never mind that just now)—the ideal attachment, which had grown to be his master passion, was for that great city of which he so often fondly spoke (quoting Edmund Spenser, who was born not many yards from John Harbuckle's own birth-place):

> "Merry London, my most kindly nurse,
> That to me gave this life's first native source."

John Harbuckle, as I have already said, was writing; and when he wrote to an antiquary he liked to write on foolscap, at a large table; he liked space and many books. He put his pen behind his ear every now and then, and going to the bookshelves, got down a thick volume or two or half-a-dozen smaller ones, pausing midway between the case and the table to read or search, but never returning any one of them to its place.

So, during the time he had been engaged upon "those few lines," he had collected John Stowe, and Strype upon Stowe, Howell, Pennant, Wilkinson, and a host of other authorities, besides maps, prints, manuscripts, note-

books without end, and an infinite number of volumes strongly bound in calf, bearing the City shield and dagger, supported by its familiar arrow-tailed griffins, and the legend, "Domine dirige nos," all done in gold.

For these books it was necessary to use the long dining-table, at which his parents, himself and his brothers and sisters had dined for many a year, in the times gone by for ever. He dined there alone now (he and Mary Bayliss being the only survivors) when he would allow sufficient space to be cleared for his meals.

After he had written for two or three hours and had made many voluminous extracts, he ceased, drew the note-books towards him, and after a long and, to judge by his countenance, diligent search, he found the required passage, wrote it down, with a smile of genuine satisfaction playing about his face (he had a grave, but kindly and somewhat humorous smile), folded the many pages containing his "few lines," addressed them to his friend, and put them into his pocket.

"I'll just step out and post this," he said, rising slowly; "I should like Woolcomb to get it as soon as possible. That last passage ought to settle him if anything will. But, like the rest of us, he loves his own opinions."

Leaving his books still heaped in confusion upon the table, John Harbuckle opened the door of his room. On the dark marble slab outside the door he found several letters waiting for him; for when it was known that he was writing, no one dared to intrude, except upon the most urgent business.

He took up the letters; those addressed, "Messrs. Harbuckle and Co., Trinity Square, E.C.," he laid aside at once, for he never opened business letters after five o'clock; but with those to "John Harbuckle, Esq." he returned to his chair by the Argand burner.

"Birrendale! Birrendale! But this isn't Mary's hand! I hope—I hope—I trust—nothing's wrong!" he exclaimed, with much agitation; and hurriedly adjusting his glasses and muttering, "Birrendale! not from Mary!" he opened the letter with the familiar postmark and the unfamiliar hand.

It ran something like this:

"The Manse, Kirkhope,
"Birrendale, N.B.

"John Harbuckle, Esq.

"My dear Sir,—I have often recalled with pleasure the brief but interesting conversation I had with you on the melancholy occasion of the funeral of your late brother-in-law, Captain James Bayliss.

The insight into your character I then obtained induces me to believe that you will not take this letter in any unfriendly spirit, nor feel that I am unwarrantably intruding upon your private affairs, when I venture to hint to you that, in my opinion, it would be better for your sister, Mrs. Bayliss, if she were nearer some kind and judicious relative, such as yourself, who would and could take the oversight of her affairs.

"I am aware of the very substantial aid you have already afforded her; aid that should have amply sufficed for her requirements; I fear however, that in spite of your kindness she will soon find herself most awkwardly placed if some one who has the right to interfere does not do so promptly.

"I do not think that merely pecuniary assistance would be of any real use to her; indeed my own feeling is that the reverse would be the case. I have endeavoured to reason with her, but in vain, as of course, I can in no way control her actions.

"I hear she has borrowed money from a man at Glasgow, in whose hands I should be very sorry to see any relative of my own. This, I feel, is a serious matter, requiring immediate attention.

"I am sure you are not aware of her po-

sition; and as I have long esteemed her as a valued parishioner, I now venture to inform you of it.

"You will be gratified to know that your niece Alison is developing something of the same love of antiquarian lore that you possess so strongly yourself.

"She is an interesting girl. The other day she showed me, with many blushes, a short paper she had written on 'Our Border Towers,' for which I have managed to secure a place in 'The Scottish Borderer,' one of our local papers. As soon as it appears I will send you a copy.

"Your sister's niece, Jessie, is another very interesting girl, although in quite another way. It might perhaps be better for her, I venture to think, as well as for her aunt's affairs, if she could be subjected to a somewhat stricter supervision than she is under at present.

"I must beg you to believe, that in thus appearing to trench upon your domestic affairs, I am actuated solely by the desire to serve your sister, and to prevent annoyance to yourself.

"I remain, My dear Sir,

"Faithfully yours,

"ANDREW BAIRD."

Five minutes earlier John Harbuckle's thoughts had been entirely engrossed in "his few lines" to his friend. His family concerns and affections had been, so to speak, buried under the fragment of Old London Wall. Only so short a time ago, as he had been writing so eagerly at that book-covered table, it had been to him as if he had not a relative in all the wide world, nor an interest more modern than the building of that wall; when lo! the Scotch clergyman's letter had come down like a bomb-shell, scattering the superincumbent mass, and had brought all John Harbuckle's family feeling on to the surface.

The old bachelor was always nervous about his women folk; believing, in the depths of his heart, that in some things they were not much better than babies, and that if left to themselves they would inevitably get into terrible mischief.

Trembling with agitation John Harbuckle again went through Mr. Baird's letter. "Can I send a telegram at once? No, too late! Can't I catch the night mail? Too late—too late! What can I do? I must go to her at once! Dear, dear, dear me! Poor Mary! Poor Mary! What am I to do?" With many such exclamations he rose from his chair, and with the

fateful letter still in his hand he began to pace up and down the room as if distracted.

"Something horrible must be behind this?" he cried, as he nervously worked the letter between his fingers. "Something he doesn't care to speak of must have forced him to write like this. He must have been driven to it. What can have happened? Good heavens! Perhaps she's half starving those dear girls. What can I do? Why did I listen to her? Why didn't I insist upon her coming back with me after the funeral? It was my duty to have insisted. Why was I so weak? Poor things! Poor things! And I must waste the whole of this night! I'll go north by the first train to-morrow. Those poor dear girls! Why did I leave them? Why did I leave them?"

Good, kind man, he never thought of blaming his sister! The fault was his own; he took it all on himself. Of course if you leave women to look after business matters, it is their nature to get into trouble as certainly as a young child will get into mischief; but in the last case the blame attaches to the nurse, not to the child; in the first, to the man who neglects, not the woman who muddles.

"Mary and those girls in the hands of an unprincipled money lender! My fault! My fault! Entirely my fault! I must have them

somewhere under my own eyes. Poor Mary! She is—hm! She is *difficult.* I feel I've been criminally weak! Yes, there's no other term for it, *criminally weak!*—very difficult to deal with, I must admit; but I ought to have been firm! Poor, dear girl!" (Mary was forty-six). "She always was too fond of her own way, but she's had many troubles. How could I have left her? And to think I can't reach her until late to-morrow!"

He paced unevenly about as much of the room as was vacant; but as he was in the habit of buying any odd piece of old furniture he thought really good and cheap, and of putting it down in any vacant place without much regard for suitability, the room by this time was far too crowded up for a comfortable walking ground; so, instinctively, John Harbuckle determined to go out, feeling that there was a good dry piece of familiar pavement in front of the Trinity House near by, quite at his disposal.

He glanced over the letter, then went slowly out on to the broad landing and up to the row of pegs where hung his overcoat and his hat. He struggled into a thick coat, put a soft and much used wide-a-wake over his scanty grey hair, and went down a few steps of a fine old panelled staircase until a

baize door of the dingiest green came in sight. This door shut off his private apartments from the offices of Messrs. Harbuckle and Company, which occupied the ground floor.

"Poor dear Mary!" he again ejaculated, something in the look of the faded door recalling to him a Sunday, how long gone by he hardly cared to think, but around which the fresh beauty of childhood still linger, when he, a strong lad of ten, had been running down those very stairs, and that same door had been pushed softly open, and his little sister Mary, returning from a voyage of discovery, had suddenly appeared, a miracle of three years old beauty. He had poised her lightly on his shoulder, and had run away with her upstairs; and his parents had laughed, how happily! how fondly! and had called her a flying cherub.

Very empty of humanity was the wide old house now. The parents were gone; the swift-footed boy was slow of movement.

"And Mary's a widow, poor girl! Poor girl! And I can't see her until this time tomorrow!" sighed John Harbuckle.

Past the baize door, slowly down a flight of stone stairs into a large entrance hall went the master of the silent house. He put his

latch key into his pocket and let himself out by a great double door that clangoured heavily behind him.

It was a cold moonlight night; it was the seventh of April. Close before him, as he left his own house, were the tall bare trees of the gardens of Trinity Square; beyond them, by lighted windows here and there, and a vast dim pile of battlements, the Tower of London made its awful presence vaguely felt.

From John Harbuckle's abode in the north-west angle of Trinity Square to the Trinity House was but a few dozen yards. John Harbuckle was accustomed to pacing up and down the open space in front of the Trinity House, and turned to it mechanically.

To-night, however, the Trinity House was brilliantly lighted up. Festivity evidently reigned among the brethren. Had it not been for those "few lines," John Harbuckle himself would at that moment have been a guest; although so perturbed had he been that he had forgotten all about the feast.

He was in no mood for festivity, and he turned away, retraced his steps, passed his own house, paused for a moment under the worn hammered iron-work of the entrance to Catherine Court, Tower Hill, took a turn or two up and down that then deserted passage,

heard his footsteps echo between the tall wall at the other end, instinctively raised his eyes to a certain window in one of the Georgian houses in the middle of the Court, and to the long iron lamp rod that runs out horizontally from the wall (the rod to which he had once thought of hanging himself—it was nearly opposite the house where *she* had lived), and then leaving the Court, he crossed Great Tower Hill, and, being provided with a private key, entered, by the gate facing a vast block of bonded warehouses, the Tower Gardens.

It was an awful solitude ; but he was used to it, and it soothed him as he paced up and down the long path high above the great deep moat, that now was filled with moon-lighted mist. The Tower, with its grey walls, its bastions, its many lights, stood beyond the moat, the edge of each wall and turret gleaming white amid the heavy shadows of the great fortress.

To-night John Harbuckle took no notice of any of these things, beloved, venerated as they were by him ; he paced up and down the long walk, himself the only human being in all those quiet gardens. There, in the heart of London, he might have heard his own footfall, or his own heart beat, so far away from worldly noise it all seemed ; and yet, in reality,

he was but a few yards below a public thoroughfare, along which many a fellow mortal was still tramping.

In half an hour or so he had grown calm; he had turned over his sister's affairs in his mind, and at last, after many an inward prayer, for he was a God-fearing man, he came to a determination as to how he would act.

Having so determined, his thoughts, set free again, went back to other times; to that circumstance of four and twenty years ago that had made him now an elderly bachelor.

He paced up and down the long walk above the moat, a solitary figure in the solemn moonlight, with his head bent, his hands clasped behind him, and in the silence he heard:

"His heart throb for the love of other years."

Out of the past, out of the Scotch clergyman's letter, up from the mists of the Tower moat, there came to him one word, a name:

JESSIE.

And that name grew and grew until it filled all his thoughts.

Suddenly the stillness was broken up; the garrison bugles sounded; while from innumerable clocks came ten strokes of various sound, and John Harbuckle left the Tower Gardens.

He left the Gardens by the gate nearest St. Katherine's Dock House, having just remembered that Woolcomb's letter was still in his pocket.

There was a pillar-box across the road, and there, a few minutes later, he saw the last of his "few lines."

Now, it so happened that a large Continental steamer had lately arrived, and that, in consequence, a great many cabs were driving about; which, as there happened to be also a very unusual amount of heavy traffic going on just then, caused some little difficulty.

At the precise moment John Harbuckle was recrossing the road from the pillar-box, the wheel of a cab got locked within the wheels of a railway van.

A man put his head out of the cab window, and called to the driver to mind what he was at.

John Harbuckle started, looked round quickly, but the man's head was already withdrawn.

"That voice! If I didn't know he was dead, I'd have sworn to that voice." As the thought flashed through his brain, he went back a step and looked into the cab. There was nothing to be seen except a man's figure among many packages.

"Ah, I've been dreaming again! The sea doesn't give up its dead in these days," said John Harbuckle, with a sigh. "I've been dreaming! It's not good for a man to be alone. I'll go home and write to Mary at once. But—that voice!"

"No! no! no!" he went on, with an excitement that was gaining on him too rapidly to be controlled, "it's impossible! yet, had it been possible, I'd have sworn to that voice!"

The upheaval caused by the Scotch clergyman's letter was as nothing compared to the fierce volcanic eruption produced by that voice.

"He robbed me of my Jessie! Here! here—in these very Gardens!" he exclaimed, as he again turned into the long, solitary walk above the moat, and began pacing it with hurried, uneven steps.

Before, he had thought of her, of him, with the sad calmness to which, during many years, he had grown used. Now, time was, for the moment, annihilated. He was a young man again; with a young man's passionate love and hate; the wild agony of that loss was as real, as fresh, as if the blow had only just been struck.

"He robbed me of my Jessie!"

He hurried on, mechanically, to a certain

spot, just as he had done four and twenty years ago.

At the other end of the walk, opposite the dark Beauchamp Tower, in which no spark of light now glimmered, there is a bench under some acacias ; in front of the bench the stone coping merely slopes upwards a little without its usual low protecting wall.

John Harbuckle came up to that coping and looked straight down into the deep moat, now all full of moon-lighted vapour, and what he had felt on that other long-past night when he had all but thrown himself down, came back to him.

Hundreds of times he had stood there since, but it was many years since he had lived that fierce hour over again as he lived it now.

That voice, belong it to whom it might, had touched a spring that was vibrating through every fibre of his being.

"He robbed me of my Jessie!"

The loss of her was as fresh as ever to-night.

He stood for a long while on that sloped coping above the moat until the storm had spent itself.

"Do I forgive?" his conscience asked his heart, as soon as it could make itself heard above the inward tumult.

"Do I forgive?"

The question came from the depths of his own soul, but the great prison fortress standing before him in the fitful moonlight gave a strange weight and solemnity to the words.

"Do I forgive? Ah! with the dead there can be no quarrel. They are in God's hands."

He looked up earnestly to a clear space between great banks of clouds that had opened above the centre of the four turrets of the White Tower. Through that pure space, it seemed to him, one might travel upwards and upwards for ever and for ever, so high and lifted up it looked.

"And now she is in Heaven, where they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, she seems once more mine," he felt. "Do I forgive? I do, with all my heart I do."

It was long before he left that spot; as he turned away at last he said, with a heavy sigh and a sad relapse into something of his accustomed tone—

"Ah, well; God's ways are past finding out. Arthur Bayliss robbed me of my Jessie, and now Providence is going to give me their Jessie to care for. Amen."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN IN THE CAB.

"I COULD have sworn to that voice!" and with the words rushing across his brain John Harbuckle had turned to look into a cab, the wheel of which was locked within the wheel of a heavy waggon.

He had seen in the cab a man's figure sitting among many packages, but the face was too far in the shadow to render recognition possible; even supposing the face to have been one John Harbuckle might have recognised.

A moment or two later the cab wheel was free, and as John Harbuckle unlocked the gate of the Tower Gardens the cab driver put his horse to a brisk pace and drove towards the Minories.

The man in the cab sat with one arm extended over his packages, gazing through the windows at the blank rows of closed shops.

"A desolate home-coming!" he said to himself bitterly. "Home! what right have

I to use such a term, except that I can't help it, it haunts me so? All this great City full —home I have none; and to me just now, a home seems the only thing in the world worth having, the only thing I really care for. What a vast desolate place it is! all this great City full, home I have none."

The words repeated themselves over and over again like an endless monotonous chime heard in sickness.

There was a strange, ghostlike solemnity about the City at ten o'clock on that moonlight night. To the man in the cab the deserted streets seemed full of grave-stones.

Along Cheapside, Fleet Street and the Strand things looked brighter, but even there, except in the printing houses, the huge town seemed tired and anxious to settle down for the night.

The cab turned up one of the streets leading to Covent Garden and stopped before the Tavistock Hotel, a house much frequented by visitors from the colonies.

A commissionaire opened the cab door and the man got out.

He was tall and had to stoop a good deal as he did so.

The porters rapidly cleared the cab, while the owner of all the packages stood under the

lighted colonnade in front of the hall door, looking on with the air of one accustomed to have everything done for him.

A well-made man he was, tall, straight; square-shouldered, and he stood so firmly that if in all else he had not seemed strictly a civilian one might have taken him for a soldier. One rarely sees a civilian stand as this man stood.

The upper part of his face was overshadowed by the brim of a hard wide-awake; the lower part was hidden by a thick moustache and a heavy beard, both still showing here and there some traces of the original brown among the grey. The beard was well-tended, crisp and curly.

He paid the cab-driver liberally, walked into the hall, gave a few orders, went upstairs to the coffee-room, which was upon the first floor.

He had rather a lordly way with him that secured prompt attention.

His strong, buffalo-hide portmanteaux, which all bore the name of "Arnold Birkett," were much stuck about with Continental labels.

It would not have been difficult to have traced his route from Lisbon to Hamburg, nor, had anyone taken the trouble to search, to

have found evidence, that the said Arnold Birkett had not so very long ago been a passenger on board one of the African Mail Steamers.

The coffee-room of the Tavistock is long and low, with much dark mahogany about it; an eminently respectable, but by no means fashionable apartment.

At one of the tables Mr. Birkett seated himself, ordered supper, the evening papers, and a fire in his room. He took his hat off as he did so, showing a tolerably broad forehead, a nose straight and well-cut, but hardly of enough importance to be quite in keeping with the rest of his appearance. His still abundant hair was fast turning from brown to grey, it was close cut, but had a distinct tendency to curl, a tendency strictly repressed by its owner, who was, on the whole, a man not very far from handsome, although there was a yellowish tone about as much of his face as could be seen that certainly was not beautiful.

He read his papers with avidity, ate his supper like a man used to the ways of decent society, asked to be shown his room, and then retired, without having exchanged a syllable with any one except the waiters.

"A desolate home-coming," said Arnold

Birkett to himself, as he stirred up the fire in his room and made it roar. "Not one word of welcome; not so much as a dog to look pleased! Ah, well! ah, well! what else could I expect? How could it be otherwise?" and he drew up a comfortable and very roomy easy-chair, well lined and padded, all covered with a cretonne as gay as English poppies and cornflowers could make it.

"Might have been worse!" spreading out his hands before the glowing coals. "A blazing fire in an open grate is something friendly, after all; and so"—with a shiver—"and so's this beastly old climate! Don't I recognise it! One's dear native land has its drawbacks. I say, what's this?" with another shiver, and his fingers on his pulse, "I shouldn't care to be laid up here with a rattling dose of African fever, and not a soul to look after one."

He felt his pulse carefully, and finding it not so very feverish, lighted a briar-wood pipe that had grown dear to him by long usage, in which operation he appeared suddenly to become wholly engrossed.

When the pipe was drawing to his satisfaction he again stirred up the fire and settled down to smoke and meditate.

His meditations could hardly have been

pleasant ones. He looked troubled, at times distressed.

Presently he took a small Russian leather case from his side pocket, opened it, gazed attentively at the portraits it contained, kissed them both affectionately, but rather in the manner of a man performing a customary act of devotion, to which some passing emotion restores, for the moment, the freshness that constant repetition has impaired, and then placed the case open before him on the mantelpiece, supporting it against an imitation Etruscan vase, and now and then looking up at it, went on smoking.

Both of the photographs were considerably faded as if they had been taken some years since.

One was the portrait of a woman whose face you could imagine might in life have been still almost youthful; a face it was that seemed made to look always bright, but which had grown, either from care or ill-health, sad and prematurely worn.

The other face was too faded to convey much meaning of any sort; but by the dress one might judge it was the portrait of a girl of ten or twelve, taken perhaps about eight or ten years ago.

Mother and daughter without a doubt.

One might have thought they were Arnold Birkett's wife and daughter, if, when he had finished his pipe, he had not so carefully, and as it were secretively, returned the portraits to his side-pocket; as if he did not care to have them seen by other eyes.

"How different it all might have been!" he sighed, as he replaced the case.

Evidently he had said the same words in exactly the same way many and many a time before.

Then his manner suddenly changed. He took out the case again, looked at the portraits again, a moisture as of tears that would never be shed dimming his eyes, and he whispered, kissing them fervently, as if they had suddenly come back to him, fresh and unfaded.

"Forgive me, my darlings! Forgive me, forgive me! How could I help it?"

Then putting up the case again, he threw himself on his knees by the bedside, flung his arms across the bed and buried his face against the counterpane.

Was he trying to make excuses to heaven? Was he bewailing the past? Was he seeking help for the morrow? Who can tell?

If he has done a great wrong will he have to bear the inevitable consequences for ever? Is there never forgiveness? or, if forgiveness,

is there for ever no release from the thraldom of one fatal act?

Ah! the dead woman *is* dead: the broken heart *is* shattered, beyond human skill to restore, the child's young life jeopardized may, perhaps, be ruined now.

He was long awake that night, but at length he slept soundly. Not once did the thoughts that had kept his brain wakeful, fashion themselves into a dream. Not on that night did that mother and child haunt him. He was so lonely that he would have been glad of their welcome had it been but in a dream.

CHAPTER V.

"OH PAST THAT IS!"

"IN those other days, I should simply have climbed to the knife-board of a City 'bus and have gone down to the Bank; now I suppose, that would be gross waste of time," said Arnold Birkett, as he finished his breakfast the next morning. "Which is the best way to get down to the City in these days?" he asked the waiter.

"Depends on what you call 'best,' sir," returned the man. "If you want to cross the river twice, see the Abbey, the 'Ouses of Parliament, the Embankment and cetera, why for that your best plan's Charing Cross to Cannon Street."

"Charing Cross! Why, the City used to lie in the opposite direction in my time!"

"So it does now, sir, only we start west to go east, that's all. You'll find the river rowt quite an interesting little tower; I always recommend it, and ten minutes will do it, if you don't get blocked outside Cannon Street."

"Sounds inviting! And the Underground, what's that like?"

"Not been by the Underground!—then you've a treat in store, sir! The infernal regions in a Christmas pantomime isn't anything near as like the real thing; only I shouldn't care to have a bad conscience when I go by the Underground; the sulphureousness of it is so life-like, it brings it 'ome to a man, and no mistake!"

"Then I'll go by the Underground," said Birkett.

"Charing Cross to Mansion 'Ouse then, sir. Do you know the way?"

"Oh yes, thanks, I can find it. This part of London isn't so very much changed."

"You'll find it where old Hungerford Market used to be."

"All right, I remember."

So after Mr. Birkett had looked through every paper in the room, and had watched a foreign fruit auction in Covent Garden, he went to Charing Cross and booked for Mansion House.

How his conscience was affected by the short journey I may not tell; but I rather imagine that the atmosphere of the Underground so irritated both his throat and temper, that conscience was not roused to

painful activity by the "sulphureousness" of the air he was compelled to breathe.

He did not look amiable as he sprang up the metal-edged stairs and towards the upper world.

"Mansion House! Where's the Mansion House?" he coughed, looking about him, when he reached the open air. "Where on earth am I? Well," with another cough, "if that voyage through Pandemonium is a specimen of what modern science can do, all I can say is, I greatly prefer the canoe of the raw native! But where am I? Oh, that's the new street, I suppose; and this? why this must be Cannon Street. Fine street, the new one! London's grown much taller and brighter and wider since I last saw it. Mansion House? I see! Well, I won't explore that brand span new thoroughfare just now, I'll keep to the old ways if I can find them." And he went down Cannon Street, paused when he came to the station, took a good look at it, went on to King William's statue, which he was glad to find standing just where he had left it with the granite cable still wound round and round, as if it had never been uncoiled since last he saw it.

"Now I know where I am!" he said, after he had safely crossed the crowded street.

"That statue's a land-mark I'm not likely to forget!"

He turned the corner and went along Eastcheap, here recognizing a well-remembered house, there observing a newer and grander building.

As he was passing the end of Rood Lane he pulled himself up sharply:

"That's the very identical harp-player, and in the very self-same place," he exclaimed.

He took a few steps up the lane.

"Where's your blind friend, with the violin?" he asked.

"In Abraham's bosom, sir!" was the grave reply.

"And you haven't found another?" asked Birkett.

The harpist, who had never ceased playing, shook his head sadly.

Birkett gave him a shilling, and, retracing his steps, soon turned the angle of the road and was in Great Tower Street, and his face, which had been grave enough before, grew graver still, as his eyes caught sight of one of the corner turrets of the White Tower.

"Ah! I feel where I am now, feel it to the deepest depths of my heart!" he said; "I could find my way from here to there blind-

fold! O the past! the past! the irrevocable past!"

He walked on steadily. Two turrets of the White Tower and a few boughs, just touched with green, now filled all the open space at the end of the street.

"Oh, this is awful! This is like going to her grave! I can't stand it! I won't go on! not to-day!" he felt rather than said in his heart.

But he never turned, he went straight on.

"The very Church! It won't do to look at it!"

But yet he paused before the porch of All Hallows, Barking, nearly at the end of the street.

His brows contracted as if with sharp pain and his eyes gazed at the fast-closed door as if they would pierce it.

"The same! No—altered like all the rest —something new amidst the old, and yet, the same! And I, too, am altered; yet—would to God I were not the same! It must all be faced. I'll face it now, if it kills me. Oh, if it would!—if only it would! I ask nothing better than to be blotted out of existence this moment!"

Vain wish! Not so easily can the burden of life be laid down. No, if that weight cuts

into the galled shoulders until they bleed, the burden must still be borne, unless—there is a Divine Promise comes in here. I need not quote it, so familiar are its gracious words to all. Happy they who have, by experience, learned it's truth!

Tower Street was crowded with huge waggons and many cabs. The grinding of the heavy wheels, the sharp click of the hard hoofs against the stone road-way never ceased; the air was laden with the smell of spicery and drugs; familiar sounds, familiar scents, bringing back how many a long by-gone day!

Birkett went on to the end of the street, and crossed a wide space among fish vans and the waggons of the bonded carmen to the pavement in front of the railings of the Tower Gardens.

Down below in the moat soldiers were being drilled, to the great amusement of a throng of squalid idlers.

Birkett went up to the rails, and stood between a group of Norwegian sailors, and a ragged urchin, as dirty and as picturesque as any Murillo ever painted, who was hanging on to the rails grinning with pure delight at the spectacle.

The Tower, the glancing of arms in the

moat, the strip of well-kept garden, the trees, two or three carefully dressed children with their attendant nurse-maid, bowling their hoops by the side of the fresh-dug flower-beds, where daffodils and primroses were blooming, made up a scene only too well remembered.

Birkett stood for some time watching the children playing about the same path along which on the night before John Harbuckle had slowly paced, thinking of his love of other days, and his face grew as wan as if he had had a severe illness.

"The Tower Gardens! Through what dreams, what fevers, what days and nights of desolation have I seen those Tower Gardens!" he said, turning away from them.

Do you remember that last evening, John Harbuckle, when he had found the pavement in front of the Trinity House too bright for him, had strolled up and down Catherine Court a few times before going into the Tower Gardens?

Arnold Birkett, seeking refuge from the noise and crowding waggons that filled all the south-west side of Tower Hill, re-crossed the road and followed the houses

until he came to the weather-worn old iron-work above the gate-way of that very same court.

In the busiest time of the City day that court is comparatively quiet, as there is no thoroughfare, except for foot-passengers.

The houses where the rich Russian merchants used to live, in the days of the great Catherine, are homes no longer, merely business premises; but good, solid, red-brick houses they are still, with long, narrow windows, and white sashes flush with the walls.

To one of those long, narrow windows Arnold Birkett raised his eyes, and for a few seconds kept them there. It was the same window that John Harbuckle so often looked up at. It belonged to the house where SHE had lived.

Nearly opposite was the horizontal lamp rod, with its curious gridiron-like appendage, to which John Harbuckle had once thought of hanging himself. Arnold Birkett had never thought of hanging *himself* there, so he took no notice of it; but he did notice the stone steps of the house, now worn hollow in the middle by constant use, and he thought, with a strange mingling of tender grief and self-reproachful bitterness, how often her little feet had come across

the threshold and down those stone steps to meet him—beautiful little feet, that would never come to meet him any more!

He turned away, as a clerk, followed by an office boy, sprang up the worn steps of the house where she had lived; he walked slowly, and with bowed head, as if following a coffin to the grave, to the other end of the court, and then came back again.

The court itself, with its broad pavement and two lines of large houses, is not without a certain dignity. A very small amount of imagination could easily fill it with grave, bewigged and bewaistcoated merchants; ladies with powdered heads, patches and flowered damask gowns; sedan-chairs, link-boys, and all that goes with the date on the oblong tablet, set in relief on a square stone on one of the walls, where one may read, in characters such as one sees in a Tonson edition of *The Spectator*—

"Catherine Court, 1725."*

To leave the court for Tower Hill you turn from the straight, broad pavement, and follow a path that twists by the side of a genuine shop of the period, which some artist ought to sketch at once, for although it can

* 1725. The year in which Peter the Great died and was succeeded by the Empress Catherine.

hardly be called lovely, it is still but little altered from its original condition, and will, no doubt, soon be either taken down or modernised.

Arnold Birkett was looking on the ground as the path wound out of the Court, but as he stood again under the fast-decaying ironwork at its entrance he raised his haggard eyes and met a view unique in all the world.

It flashed upon him like a sudden marvel of fresh beauty now, as it had done many and many a time before.

There just before him were the budding trees and the fresh green grass of Trinity Square; and behind that filmy veil of delicate green, all "clad in colours of the air," stood the great pile of The Tower buildings, a multitude of great lines, harmonious yet broken up into a variety of detail most grateful even to eyes that knew not why they were charmed.

Long straight walls, bold round bastions, the great square White Tower with its four turrets, each differing, but each crowned; the light belfry of St. Peter's Church (where sleep three headless queens), the many chimnied dwellings, the quaint Look-Out of the Bell Tower standing in mid air sheer against the blue sky—a mast or two beyond:

"And we have looked at it all together,

how many a time! How many a time! She, my darling, was with me when I first saw it! It is all too beautiful, too dreadful! All too like a dream, all too sadly real! Oh, Jessie! Jessie! forgive, forgive me, dear!

"Too real! There was a freshness in the new verdure of the trees that made that scene more life-like to Arnold Birkett than anything else he had yet revisited.

He would have been thankful for some refuge then; but the church door he had not long passed was close-barred, there was no resting place there; the Tower Gardens and those of Trinity Square were only for the privileged few; there was no place for quiet, no place where grief could have its way unobserved, and, as an Englishman cannot show his feelings if he is observed, Arnold Birkett followed the unwritten law of the City and moved on.

He moved on mechanically to John Harbuckle's house, noticed the name was still where it used to be, then he went no further.

At the corner, by the great block of bonded warehouses, an old Irish woman, who swept the crossing there, implored him, in a ghost of a voice for the love of heaven to help her in supporting her starving family.

He put his hand in his pocket and gave her sixpence, for which she called down the blessings of all the saints upon his head.

After he had gone a few steps in the direction of Barking churchyard, which is immediately behind the bonded warehouses, he returned and adding another sixpence to his gift, asked,

"Have you held this crossing long?"

"Lord bless you, my good gentleman, and it's me poor children'll have such a supper to-night——"

"How long?" repeated Birkett, cutting her short.

"Near seven years, sir."

"Then you know most of the people in the square? Does any one live in that house?" pointing to John Harbuckle's. "The ground floor is offices, I see. Does any one live there?"

"Only the old gentleman, sir," replied the woman, "and many's the shilling he's given me, or sure I'd be starved."

"What old gentleman?" asked Birkett.

"Mr. Harbuckle, sir."

"Any ladies?"

"Lord love you, sir! no, sir!" exclaimed the sweeper, dropping her professional whine.

"Mr. Harbuckle's an old bachelor gen-

tleman, and there's never a lady there; leastways, only Mr. and Mrs. Robbins as does for him."

"Well! Good morning."

"Good morning, sir, and God bless you, and send you this way again very soon."

With which benediction still in his ears, Mr. Birkett turned into Barking churchyard.

"Then he's still there! My poor little girl, where is she? He knows! Dare I ask him?"

So thinking he walked on, looking as much shaken as if he had had a severe illness.

John Harbuckle had already posted his letter to his sister in the North. He had written it late the night before. It was dated April 7th.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEREIN IS SET FORTH THE WILINESS OF AN INGENUOUS GENTLEMAN.

IT was the second morning after that evening, destined long to be remembered, on which Jessie Bayliss had added another severe scorching to the toes of her already scorched slippers, the evening of that sudden upheaval of John Harbuckle's buried affections and of the arrival of the man in the cab.

The wind had abated somewhat of the loudness of its clamour, but what it had lost in fury, it had gained in biting spite.

The firs and spruces around Mary Bayliss's house looked blacker, the grey clouds darker and colder than ever, the very ground seemed suffering actual pain from the long, dreary winter when the widow opened her eyes to a day-light that had grown hateful to her and her heart to a fresh sense of calamity.

"Those girls; Those girls! How they are coughing!" she said.

The stone walls of her house were thick,

but yet she could hear that sound, and it smote not only her heart but her conscience.

"Ah! If I could only feel that I was not hurting my girls, the rest would matter little!" she sighed. She was afraid that all that long, dreary winter their clothing had not been warm enough, that she had made them live more hardly than girls used to home comforts could well bear.

"I wonder if that little calf is still alive?" she went on. "I can't understand how it is that all our stock dies! The animals, at any rate, never have to go without, whatever we may do; I can't blame myself for that; and yet they die! I can't understand it! I shall get rid of McQuade."

The widow made a hasty toilet, put on a weather-beaten hat, heavily trimmed with crape, wrapped her late husband's shepherd plaid tightly round her, and went into the hall, where her only serving maid, Janet, was already at work; unbolted the door, drawing her veil closely over her face as the deadly east wind cut her.

From the little plateau above the Birren, upon which Cauldknowe stood, all looked bleak and bare as desolation itself. There was a chill blackness in the grey atmosphere, depressing enough to the strongest and hap-

piest, that seemed to Mary Bayliss, laden with despair and death.

For one moment she paused before the closed windows by which the Captain had stood lost in admiration on that fatally lovely autumn day more than four years ago. The refined domesticity was all gone now. The smooth, green sward where the children had played was unshorn and knotty; the broad, grey drive covered with stunted weeds; the firs and spruces black and funereal; the river tearing wildly down to the Solway with a roar that reminded the town-born woman of the roar of London at mid-day, and for an instant took her back to her childhood's home.

Only for a moment did she pause to note the desolation of everything around, and then she set off at a brisk rate towards the farm, which lay on the other side of the road.

"Everything wants doing! Give it up? No, I'd die sooner!" she said, as she hurried past the untended gardens beside the rhododendron banks. "What's the use of living without this place, which cost my precious one his life?" Then she heard, in fancy, the girls' coughs, and a horrible dread crept into her heart and chilled it. "What, if I kill my girls in the struggle? Myself?—that's

nothing. I'd gladly sacrifice myself and all I have; but my girls—my girls! Oh, they make me so anxious, they are not fit for hardships? But I couldn't tear myself away from here!" and she crossed the dry, hard road to the Knowe Farm.

In the meanwhile the girls had risen, had put on each an old black serge dress, a small shawl of black and red plaid, and had gone into the kitchen to see about breakfast, Janet, the maid, being highly incompetent except for the roughest work. She had, however, made up a good fire, put on the kettle, cleaned the "girdle," and made the place look tolerably tidy.

"Sh-sh-sh-sh-sh-o-o-o!" said Jessie, in a succession of syllables like demi-semiquavers, shivering as she spoke. "Well, Alie, there's just a splendid fire, at any rate; and that's the best thing we've seen this morning."

"We'll have a good burn to begin with," said Alison, coughing. And the two girls knelt down side by side in front of the fire.

"Poor mother," said Alison, "what a morning for her to turn out upon. I do wish she wouldn't! I wonder if the wee calf's dead?"

"Of course it is," said Jessie, spreading out

both hands to the blaze, "don't our calves always die; but?"—turning round suddenly—"oh bliss! What do I see—one, two, three, four eggs on the dresser! You don't mean to say we can have one each for breakfast! What unheard-off luxury!"

"Ah, that's grand," said Alison. "Then we need not trouble about making porridge, and I feel very lazy this morning. I"— then she coughed again—"I wish I could get rid of this cold, it makes me so stupid."

"You would get up, you know! You made me stay in bed and be waited upon when my cold was bad. Well this won't do! We shan't have breakfast ready by the time Auntie comes in, if we don't make a move. It's my turn to scone this morning—you coffee—I'll scone." Jessie had an airy way of using nouns as verbs, but no doubt you can understand her.

Leaving her cousin in possession of the whole of the front of the fire Jessie, who, now she was warm, felt well and brisk, went about the kitchen, the heels of her shoes clattering merrily over the red stone floor, collected buttermilk, flour, and soda, put the broad girdle on the fire to get hot, and set to work to make the scones for breakfast.

It was a pretty sight to see Jessie at the

pastry board. The fact is, that Jessie was herself, at any time, a pretty girl to see. She was just sufficiently tall to be graceful, well grown, with a pliant young figure, that looked charming anywhere. Her black serge—old, indeed, and a good deal rubbed about the sleeves—fitted her closely. It was the work of a local dressmaker, but Jessie herself had altered and altered it until now, in its old age, it was really a creditable fit. Her little red plaid shawl was pinned neatly over her shoulders. Her bright brown hair was crisply waved, by nature, to a certain extent. but in this case nature had been liberally assisted by art, for no amount of cold or sleepiness would have prevented Jessie from crimping her hair over night. Her face was a delicate oval—perhaps just the least in the world too narrow, with a straight, slender nose; her rosy lips parted, on the slightest provocation, in a smile that showed their perfect drawing, and her large, bright eyes were of a liquid beauty that would have made even plain features attractive. These eyes had a little trick difficult to define. They suddenly laughed with mirth or clouded with sadness.

Jessie was neat-handed, too, about her household work; and that gift, which is so very charming in any girl, is quite irresistible in a

pretty one. To see her deftly mix up those scones, to see her roll them out and neatly cut them into shape was, thought Alison, who, like everyone else, adored Jessie, a sight at any time worth the seeing, and she turned from the fire to watch her cousin with unalloyed admiration. Isn't it charming to see girls admire one another?

"I wish I could do things as nicely as you do," sighed Alison from the fender.

"So you do, and a great deal better," returned Jessie, from the table, stamping out, as she spoke, a scone with an inverted tumbler the cutter proper being broken or lost; "besides which, my dear child, you are a talented authoress, and I'm a mere nobody! Look here, Alie, as you're not well, I'll make the coffee and you sit there and turn the scones."

"All right," said Alison, thankful to be able to keep near the fire. "The girdle's just splendid."

So Jessie put the scones on the hot iron girdle, and giving Alison a knife to turn them with, remarked:

"Here, talented authoress; and don't do the King Alfred business! Don't let my cakes burn while you are dreaming about 'Our Border Towers.'"

Alison laughed and actually blushed.

"No, I'll be very careful," she said, "and I wonder, I wonder—when my paper will be out. I'm thinking of another——"

"Oh, please wait till those things are cooked," said Jessie, measuring out the coffee. "We're just through with coffee, I'm sorry to see. I do so hate having to tell Auntie; I hope McQuade will be able to go and fetch up the coals to-day, or we shan't have enough for to-morrow, and Janet's been lavish this morning."

"I really must do something——" said Alison, with a tinge of pain quite audible in her voice.

"But they won't pay you," interrupted Jessie.

"But it leads to something; one must make a beginning. Don't you think a paper on 'Bruce and the Royal Burgh of Annan' would be interesting?"

"Not to me; I never wish to hear his name again. I am sick and tired of him; go in for a novel, Alie."

"Ah! but you see I haven't a light hand," said Alison, pensively, turning a puffy scone as she spoke. The want of "lightness" must have been metaphorical, that scone was turned easily enough.

"Well, I must say at present you're a trifle heavy; then I never was an antiquary, so of course I can't be expected to care for such dry-as-dust subjects as you take up; and it's difficult for me to imagine other people liking what I don't like; but——"

"but what?" asked Alison, eagerly.

"The scones are burning!" cried Jessie.

"No, no, I've saved them!—but what were you going to say?"

"Why, I was going to say you've a most admirable heroine all ready for use," returned Jessie.

"Who?—Fair Helen of Kirkconnel?" asked Alison.

"Fair fiddlesticks! Me, of course, you old bat!" exclaimed Jessie, with ungrammatical energy, facing her cousin suddenly with her pretty figure at its tallest, and her eyes twinkling with mirth.

"You?" asked Alison, looking up at Jessie from the fender, with a curious mixture of earnest enquiry and amusement. "You—why you're not an historical personage!"

"Na-a!" said Jessie, suddenly breaking into the Birrendale accent; "but I'm an aaful pretty gaerl!" and her eyes, always bright, sparkled with fun.

"Pretty? Pretty good looking!" laughed

Alison. "Do you think three volumes devoted to a description of your mediocre charms would be any lighter reading than 'Our Border Towers?' But are you going to boil the eggs or must I? There, the scones are done to a turn!" and Alison stood the flowery cakes up on end on the table.

"Heaven and earth! What a thing it is to have no invention," exclaimed Jessie. ("I'll do the eggs, don't you move.) But that's the curiousness of every thing! I have heaps of invention but I can't write; you can write but where's your invention? Now I've seen myself the heroine of at least a dozen novels. You know I'm in my own mind always the centre of a little drama, and always have been as long as I can remember anything. What is the use of being—well, yes, I will say it—an exceptionally pretty girl, and an orphan—orphans are always interesting—if one can't——"

"If one can't flirt with Mac Carrutherses or the poker, or the boy Baird," put in Alison, drily.

"A severe old maid at twenty, that's what you are, Alie! Come, there's Auntie frozen to death, I'm sure. Let's get the breakfast in at once."

They found Mrs. Bayliss crouching over the dining-room fire, the picture of woe.

"Oh, the last little calf's dead!" she exclaimed as soon as she heard the girls' footsteps; "all our stock dies; everything's a failure! Alie, my darling child, how you coughed in the night! why did you get up?"

"I think my cold's a little better this morning, mother, and I've just had a good burn by the kitchen fire; don't worry about me. I shall be all right as soon as the wind changes."

"When it changes! That won't be till everything is utterly ruined," said the widow, bitterly. "Give me some coffee. I'm half dead; the wind this morning is positively fiendish!"

"Mother!" said Alison, with a sad and tender reproof in her voice.

"Very wrong, my dear, I dare say; but I'm too wretched to be orthodox," retorted Mary, sharply. She had been thinking of the fast-dwindling borrowed money as well as of the dead calf.

The girls could not talk when Mary looked so miserable. As a rule there were no letters nor papers to bring a current of fresh life from the great world; it was wofully dull.

They turned to the table and took their

breakfast in silence, feeling that another dreary day was before them.

"Mother, you'll be able to spare McQuade to fetch up the coals from Kirkhope this morning Alison presently ventured to ask, but she put the question rather timidly.

"I can't possibly spare him to-day, and the cart's wanted on the farm," said Mrs. Bayliss.

"But we've hardly any left," said Alison, "we shan't be able to cook to-morrow."

"You must make them do; I can't spare him to-day. I'll send him down to-morrow as early as I can."

"We wanted him to bring several things up with him," put in Jessie. "We want coffee, and——"

"Everything, I suppose," said Mrs. Bayliss, grimly. "For to-day, you must manage with what you have. There's always one resource left; *one can always go without.*"

The girls said no more; but the little spark of cheerfulness that the warmth and business of the kitchen had given them was effectually quenched. Perpetual going without, unless to the most heroic minds, is a very depressing process, especially when a bitter east wind is blowing.

"And it's quite possible to go without once

too often," said Jessie, nerved to boldness by the thought of Alison's cold.

"You are in the conspiracy then, I suppose, Jessie," said Mrs. Bayliss with some temper.

"Conspiracy, aunt! what conspiracy can be hidden in wanting coals and coffee!"

"Read that," said Mrs. Bayliss, drawing John Harbuckle's letter out of her pocket, and throwing it on the table as if it had been a bill with a demand for immediate payment.

"From uncle John!" exclaimed both the girls, trying to seize the letter as they spoke; "how delightful to see his handwriting again!"

The postman had given it to Mrs. Bayliss at the farm.

In the early days of the Captain's occupancy of Cauldknowe there had been a lodge-keeper and a post bag; now the letters were left at the farm, which was close to the road, as the man could not go up the long drive.

Mrs. Bayliss had been on the point of returning home when the man had given her John Harbuckle's letter.

She had looked at the address and recognised the hand, read it, and, as if in anger, thrust it into her pocket and hurried home through a chilling fall of sleet, her husband's plaid wrapped closely round her, her battered crape

hat tied down by her widow's veil. One could not see her face, but her step was agitated and uneven.

"He means to get us away if he can by any means!" she had said to herself as she hurried along. "To take me away from my husband's grave and from all that reminds me of him! How is it possible I could live anywhere else? But John can't know, how should he? how I cling to every stick and stone that my poor darling's eyes once rested upon. Ah, there's that araucaria he moved just before his accident, the last tree he ever touched—that's dying, like everything else! But how can I leave it! How can I?"

She felt half-choked with grief as she stopped a moment and looked at a "monkey puzzler" that had turned brown from want of nourishment, and her face grew furrowed, and tears filled her eyes.

She went on again through the sleet with a foreboding in her heart that the letter she had crushed into her pocket meant change; and a resolute determination to be cut to pieces by inches sooner than yield formed rapidly in her mind.

"What a long while it is since he has written!" said Alison, to whose share the letter fell at last.

Ah, my dear, widows and orphans are rarely over-burdened with letters from any one!" said Mrs. Bayliss, acidly; "read it aloud, Alison. You're smiling—but I can assure you, with me it's no smiling matter."

Alison tried to look serious; but the little remark under the address had tickled her fancy; however she began to read—

"Trinity Square,
"Tower Hill, S.E.

("Undoubtedly the finest square in the world.)

"My dearest Mary,"

("Humph! How very affectionate all at once!" interpolated the widow. "He has generally been quite content with plain 'dear.'"

"Oh, it doesn't mean you're his 'dearest altogether,' Auntie," Jessie hastened to explain, her spirits rising at the sight of the letter; "but that you're the 'dearest *Mary*' he possesses. Go on please, Alison, I'm dying to hear that letter.")

"My dearest Mary," Alison recommenced, "I have been hoping to hear from you and the girls, for some considerable time past; but as you all seem to have forgotten my existence, I now take the liberty of reminding you that I am still alive, and, to tell the truth, more than a little perplexed by a domestic problem

that appears to me exceedingly difficult of solution, except upon an hypothesis that I shrink from entertaining."

("Does that mean he's going to get married at last? There's no depending on the most confirmed old bachelors!" threw in Jessie.

"This is a serious subject," said Mrs. Bayliss, knitting her brows, and then continuing to read, Alison went on.)

"Mr. and Mrs. Robbins, the excellent people who look after me and my house, are, I have every reason to believe, a most respectable and conscientious couple; how then does it come about that my household expenditure now is exactly double what it used to be in our dear mother's time? I might be willing, or rather, I could perhaps bring myself to believe, that it takes more to keep one person than it does to keep two, but I fail to understand why it should cost double as much. It is true that Mrs. Robbins is a most admirable cook, and, as one of the later Greek poets hath it—'Among the philosophers I place a cook.' I admit most cheerfully Mrs. Robbins's talent in this important particular, and I am willing to allow her scope for the exercise of that talent; but still, it seems to me that my daily *menu*, after all, does not warrant the exorbitant—not to put too fine a point upon it—

the exorbitant demands that are perpetually being made upon my purse; especially when I take into consideration the fact that I am fond of prowling about Billingsgate and Leadenhall Markets, and of choosing the particular little bit I happen to fancy, for which I invariably pay at the time.

"The fact is, my dearest Mary, I am beginning to realise, by painful, and, I must add, costly experience, that there are subjects with which the masculine mind, unless it has received a specific training, is unable to cope. I mean, that unless a man has been a purser, or something of the sort, he wants a feminine relative to look after the details of his housekeeping, or he finds himself veering towards an hypothesis, that, if in the case of such a highly respectable and conscientious couple as Mr. and Mrs. Robbins, he will naturally shrink from entertaining for a moment.

"Mary, my dear girl, I have been wandering about our old home to-night and find it full of emptiness and the memories of other times. I have a sister and two nieces (for I am sure your Jessie will let me be her Uncle John), and as I have wandered about among my old furniture (I have some really fine examples, I assure you), in my mind's eye I have seen many very pretty pictures, of

course containing feminine figures, without which there can never be a picture worth looking at, as most artists will admit. I know how fondly you cling to your present home. I do not blame you; I, too, sometimes—indeed, often—take a turn or two through Catherine Court, or the Tower Gardens, so I will not urge you to come here against your own feelings; but might it not be an advantage to the girls? The little bird in the air that carries news informs me that Alison has written a good paper on 'Our Border Towers.' I cannot tell you how gratified I am to find her taking such an interest in local antiquities. She would find herself here, upon Tower Hill, in the very midst of the History of England, and would be of invaluable assistance to me, as it is impossible for a business man like myself to spend hours in the Guildhall Library or the British Museum. I believe, in fact, that were you and the girls with me I should take a new lease of life; so, if possible, come.

"If you really can make up your mind to take me and my purse out of the hands of Mr. and Mrs. Robbins (by which a great pecuniary saving will be effected), I will come to Birrendale for a few days and put things straight for you. Have you ever thought of letting Cauldknowe furnished? That would

remove the necessity for your leaving the place altogether, and as there is such good fishing in the Birren you would have little difficulty in securing a tenant at once, if you were willing to accept a reasonable rent.

"Think this over, and let me know your decision as soon as possible. I shall look for it anxiously. In the meantime believe me, my dearest Mary, with much love to yourself and the girls,

"Your most affectionate brother,

"JOHN HARBUCKLE."

"What a dear letter! Why who can have told him of my paper!" exclaimed Alison, as she ceased reading. And with her grey eyes beaming with pleasure and her whole face animated she looked almost, if not quite, a pretty girl.

Alison was not as Jessie was, a girl everyone admired. She never struck people at once: indeed her face so varied with her thoughts and feelings that one could hardly say what she was like. When she was dull, she looked almost, if not quite, plain, when pleased almost, if not altogether, pretty. She had good grey eyes, dark brown hair, a small, very well shaped, compact little head, and wild irregular features, that contrasted rather strangely with her ordinary sedate manner.

She wore just the same kind of old black serge as Jessie, but she did not look so neat and trim in it. Her shawl was pinned awry, her abundant hair which had not the trace of a wave in it, had been brushed back as smoothly as satin when she left her room, but had managed to get rough and out of order by this time. She looked like an odd mixture of a wild mountain girl, a blue-stocking, a Puritan maiden, and a bright-eyed, inquisitive terrier; just now, particularly like this last.

"Oh, mother, how charming to live on Tower Hill! I can imagine nothing more delightful," cried Alison; "I remember going to see grandmother there years ago. It's been in my mind ever since. I've often wondered why Sir Walter never went to live on Tower Hill!"

"All the better for you, Alison," put in Jessie; "you can write his London novels for him, you know! But, oh Auntie, if you'll only say you'll take us to London I'll jump right over the top of the house this very instant minute! That letter opens up a most lovely, heavenly vision; do, do, there's a good kind Auntie, do let us go!"

Jessie clasping her hands, which were round and pretty, if rather red, and turning her bright eyes eagerly to her aunt, compelled

a smile even from Mrs. Bayliss, who was, it must be confessed, seldom quite unmoved by Jessie's charms

"You're going to let us go, aren't you?" continued Jessie, strengthening the effect of her clasped hands and brilliant eyes, as she noticed that she had already made some impression upon her aunt.

But there, I am afraid she just over-shot the mark, and aroused Mrs. Bayliss to the fact that Jessie was actually attacking her known objections to leaving Cauldknowe.

Mrs. Bayliss, acting on the defensive, crushed back the smile that, unbidden, had slightly curved her lips and drew her mouth down at the corners again.

"What, leave your poor uncle in his grave, Jessie?" she asked, reproachfully.

"Mother dear, Heaven is as near to London as it is to Birrendale," said Alison, gently.

"Yes, yes, but still"—and her voice gave way suddenly, "you can't, you can't know, children, you can't possibly know!" and, not liking to cry before the girls, she went off to her own cold room and locked herself in with her grief.

The girls looked after her in silence and dismay as she hurried from them. They were used to these outbursts of tears, but each one

made them feel sadder than the last had done.

"Poor Mammie!" sighed Alison, "ah me!" Then there was another silence during which Alison put the breakfast things together on a tray.

"I wonder sometimes," she said presently, under her voice, as she took off the crumbs with the scoop, "I wonder sometimes if any other man was ever so deeply mourned as my father is."

"Mine!" said Jessie, in the same undertone. "My father's death killed my mother. I shall never forget how she looked all the time from the day she heard of that wreck until she died. Although I was quite a child then, I shall always see her face as it was during those dreadful months. Poor darling mother, how sweet she was! How good, too good for this rough world! Oh, Alison, do you know she came to me last night, and smiled! I was so thankful! It made me feel so strangely happy! She smiled again, think of that! And so gently and happily! Perhaps it means something! Can it be an omen of good? There is to be an end to all this wretchedness perhaps? Oh, how I hope so! Stop a minute, Alie, don't ring the bell just yet," and she drew up her chair to the fire and put on another log. "What does that

mean about Catherine Court and the Tower Gardens in uncle John's letter? I don't quite see what that allusion refers to, and yet—and yet"—she paused as if trying to catch some fleeting memory—"the names recall something to my mind. Ah!" suddenly brightening, "I remember! Mother used to speak of them a long while ago, when I was very little, but not much afterwards."

"Don't you know she used to live there when she was a girl?" said Alison, who had taken up her favourite position on the corner of the low stone wall that bounded the tiled hearth. Her cold was much better, but she was a long way from well

"I knew she had stayed there, but I didn't know it was her home," said Jessie.

"Oh, yes it was. She and my mother lived quite near each other, and used to play in the Tower Gardens when they were children. Your mother was younger than mine and everybody's pet."

"Ah! like her daughter!" said Jessie, with a faint attempt at mirthfulness.

"Everybody's pet," continued Alison; "but I fancy, although I've never been told very distinctly, that she was—that is, that uncle John, who of course was young once the same as other people, liked her very much indeed;

only, you see, my father happening to have a brother, almost as fascinating——"

"Not almost—quite," said Jessie.

"Well, we know what we mean, don't we? I can't tell you exactly how it was. Mother isn't proud of being a citizeness; she never cares to talk about it. It's a pity, because the City of London would interest me so very much more than any other place in the world. But now, about this letter! It will have to be answered. Dear uncle John! when an ingenuous man attempts to be wily how transparent he is! Of course he knows how wretched we are here and he wants to help us. You'd like to go to London, I suppose?"

Jessie clasped her head as if to keep her crinkly hair from flying off with amazement that Alison should have asked such a question.

"Go! Why I'd crawl there on my knees if I couldn't get there any other way! London! the idea of living there is simple bliss after our late experience! The idea of seeing people—of being in a place where there are people, is so delicious!"

"So I think," said Alison. "And Tower Hill—the City—what a field for research!"

"What a field for living instead of existing!" said Jessie. "But what about Auntie? How can we make her listen to reason, if, as soon as

we allude to the subject, she goes and shuts herself up and cries?"

"Jessie," said Alison, gravely, "she must go."

"You mean, if she doesn't go, she will, one day, be turned out," said Jessie, with a sort of dryness that with her indicated mental pain.

Alison slowly bent her head in assent.

"Now we've this opening before us, we musn't let that happen, must we?" she said, after a momentary pause. "Now, it would be cruel to let it happen; and we've no right to ask uncle John to throw away any more of his money. Besides, I'm sure he wouldn't do it; why should he? No, we must go. If mother refuses uncle John's offer, I shall write on my own responsibility and tell him exactly how things stand. We're now just living—no, I won't call it living—we're just barely existing on as little of the money mother borrowed as will keep our bodies and souls together, and the rest goes to that devouring farm. I dread tearing mother away, but it will have to be done, Jessie. And when the wrench is over it will be better for her, and—she's coming; let us run off and get our room done, before we discuss it with her—come at once; she won't care to see us just now."

And ringing the bell for Janet to clear away,

the two girls went off to make their own beds and dust at their room, while Mrs. Bayliss went to the kitchen, and interviewed one Edward Irving, a labourer from the farm, who had been sent up to the house for a good many things he was not at all likely to get.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAPTAIN'S LAST GREAT WORK.

THE girls having arranged their own room, went to Mrs. Bayliss's, where Alison was much moved on observing that the quilt, by the side of which her mother had evidently been kneeling, was still impressed with the form of her head and wet with her tears.

Allison made no remark about it to Jessie, but wondered sorrowfully to what decision her mother had come. Was she still clinging with heroic folly to her ruin or had she come at the still more heroic determination of yielding for the sake of her girls?

Many little things about the room had been recently moved. She must again have been inspecting her husband's relics and asking, as it were, counsel of his watch and of the covers of his favourite books.

There was no upstairs to this Birrendale house. The bedrooms ran out from a corridor leading to the entrance hall, on the opposite

side of which were the dining-room and the drawing-room; this last-named being that fatal apartment by whose open windows the poor Captain had stood drinking tea out of the cups with the heather pattern, and wondering at the loveliness of the wooded banks of the rapid stream as seen though a cunningly contrived vista.

That room had been shut up now for many months. The few visitors that called were received in what had become the one and only living-room. Great, therefore, was the surprise when the two girls, coming from their household work, noticed that the drawing-room door stood ajar and that a stream of cold grey light was issuing therefrom, falling upon a trophy in the hall that the Captain had made of the weapons he had collected during his foreign service.

In that house the memorials of the late Captain were everywhere.

"Can any one have called?" whispered Alison; "you're tidy, go into the drawing-room and find out."

Alison, poor girl, was perpetually haunted by a feeling that she was terribly untidy. Certainly she was not so trim and neat as Jessie, but very untidy she rarely looked to other eyes than her own.

"I don't think there can be anyone so early," said Jessie. "I'll just peep in," and she cautiously pushed open the door.

The shutters were thrown wide open, but Mrs. Bayliss was the only person in the room, and she was standing lost in mournful thought before an easel, gazing at her husband's latest work of art.

Jessie stepped back into the hall.

"There's no one there except Auntie. She's looking at poor uncle's pictures," she said, under her voice. "Let's go into the dining-room, I'm frozen."

"No, no, let's go to her! she's been alone long enough," returned Alison in a hurried and anxious whisper. "Come, dear!"

And she quietly crossed the room and stood with Jessie behind her mother, and, without a word from any of them, looked at her father's last work; the widow only indicating that she was aware of their presence by a slight movement of her eyes from the portrait on the easel to a small pencil sketch of a young man's head that she held in her hand.

It was a pathetic little group, the widow in her shabby crape, the girls in the worn serges, with the one touch of brightness in their little shawls. They all stood so still and sad; so sorrowful with loss, so anxious for the future.

Pathetic—yes—but dare I describe the relic before whose shrine they stood?

It was that unfinished portrait of his wife of which Captain Bayliss had once spoken to his friend Major Johnstone, and which he had declared everyone had recognized as "a striking likeness."

"A striking likeness!" Heaven forbid that any woman anywhere in all the world should be like that unspeakable thing! The mouth!—one's blood curdles to think of that mouth; of those livid eyes, so ghoul-like in expression.

It was appallingly awful and infra-human, yet, horror of horrors! it bore a hideous resemblance to the broken-hearted woman standing before it. You could tell it was meant for her.

It was colossal in size. Had there been a body of like proportion it must have risen—ugh! I shudder as I imagine that hideous form rising—growing like the poodle does in Faust—until it reached the ceiling, and then pushing—for there was force enough in the huge muscles of that unclothed neck to push through anything—through the roof and impiously facing the grey sky overhead. Oh! that head and bust! It was a thing to haunt you for ever if you once saw it!

And here, of course, I am supposing that you had eyes to see it. Mary Bayliss had not, or I doubt whether even she would have been devoted enough to her husband's memory to have exhibited such a horror in her own drawing-room as "a portrait of herself."

She was, however, dimly aware that it was not lovely, but she excused that on the ground of its unfinished condition. What she did know, what was burnt into her heart, was the fact it had been worked at in those happy, happy days, that sweet second honey-moon, when she and her Captain had first come to Birrendale. Alas for those days! where were they now? Gone with the frail meadow-sweet the girls had picked down by the still salmon pool on those delicious autumn evenings, when he and she used to read and talk together! Gone, all gone; but this—this work of his, this evidence of his love for her—this remained! Her portrait was his last attempt at art.

After the three had stood before this precious relic for a few seconds, which seemed quite a long while to the girls, Mary went to the window and carefully examined the sketch she had been holding in her hand.

"Jessie, come here darling," she presently said, in a gentle, tearful voice.

Jessie went to her, feeling very much as if

she were in a mortuary chapel, listening to the burial service.

"Yes, Auntie, dear?" she asked, under her voice.

"You have not seen this before, love."

It was a slight pencil drawing of a young man, with a large frontal development, and very small features. It must have been done many years ago, the paper was quite discoloured. Under the portrait was written, in Mary's hand:

"Poor Arthur—my dearest James's first portrait."

"Your father, Jessie."

"Yes," said Jessie; but her tone implied, "I don't recognise it in the least."

"Taken many years before you can remember, dear. Your poor mother prized it fondly. I am going to give it to you, darling, pray be very, very careful of it. Here, Jessie."

"Thank you, Auntie," said Jessie, kissing Mary with a little clinging action, to which the widow responded by folding the girl in her arms.

"My darling, almost with his last breath, said, 'You'll always be kind to poor Arthur's Jessie,'" she sighed. "I hope I'm good to you, my dear?" stroking the girl's hair.

"Oh, Auntie! how can you ask?" murmured Jessie.

"Alison, love, I've been selfish, my grief has made me forget you," said Mary, turning to her daughter. "No, dear, not forget you; but I've thought, perhaps too much, that you were only mine; I ought, perhaps, to have remembered—to have thought more that you were his—a sacred trust left by him."

"Dearest mother," said Alison, the tears rushing into her own eyes, "we know—we know a little how hard it must be for you to leave this place. But you will let us go to London, won't you?"

"Don't press me, child! I'll write. I'll write to uncle John and ask him to come here—I'll try to make him understand, if I can; but how can he know what I feel? What sympathy can there be between us? How am I to live away from here? But I'll try to write—I'll try to make him understand."

Without another word she turned abruptly and went into the dining-room, took several sheets of Alison's scribbling paper, and began to write.

Mrs. Bayliss, sitting writing at the table, looked singularly unattractive. She had, of course, taken off her hat, but she had not yet

given herself the trouble to put on the cap, and collar and wristbands she generally wore. What was the use? she would have probably to go out about the ground "the policy," as they called it there, or over to the farm many times yet before evening.

Mary Harbuckle at four years of age had been a miracle of fair, childish beauty; at eighteen rather a pretty girl. Mary Bayliss at thirty had been a tolerably good-looking young matron (she had in fact been greatly admired both at "Gib" and at Malta when she and the Captain had been quartered at those places); but now, at forty-six, her hair, without gaining the dignity of grey, had lost its colour and was very thin; what little remained of it was so tightly drawn off her face, and brushed so closely to her head, that it was almost as if she were bald; which effect was heightened by her colourless eye-brows and lashes, and the general hard, shiny pinkness of her whole complexion, that constant exposure to rough weather, as well as years, had sadly scarred and dried.

As she wrote, the corners of her mouth, the most expressive part of her face, told of desolating grief. Her grief was now her one luxury in life, she hugged it to her, almost as if it had worn some visible form, and with a

dogged resolution that nothing should separate her from it. James Bayliss's widow was a very different woman from James Bayliss's wife; there may, indeed, always have been the same admixture in her character, but what had once been weak was strong now, and what had in other days been most prominent had receded; she was an entirely changed woman.

Not many minutes did she sit there. The man, McQuade, soon came over to sow the peas which should have been in the ground some weeks ago. Mary went out with him, and stood in the bitter wind, wrangling about the best place for them for some time, then came back, tore up the elaborate epistle to her brother she had already composed, and began the first draft of another.

When her mother left the drawing room, Alison went up to the window to close the shutter.

Jessie followed her. For a moment they both stood looking out at the cold grey day.

"Alison! you must take me away, dear!" said Jessie, very miserably, laying her head on Alison's shoulder as she spoke. "You will take me away, won't you?" she continued, dropping into a half-childish whine. "Alie, you won't let me be thrown to the wolves?"

"I can't bear to have to fight her!" returned Alison.

"We can't stay here and be killed! and all for nothing too," exclaimed Jessie.

"Never mind, darling, we'll go! We *will go*. I will, I must take you away. I won't have you killed."

"Because I shall be very soon," said Jessie, with a pathetic simplicity like a sick child's.

"Come, don't let us freeze in here any longer. There's the dinner to see after," said Alison, bravely, but stooping to kiss Jessie's hair as she spoke.

"Dinner! I don't believe there is any!" said Jessie, as if much inclined to cry.

"At any rate, we'd better arrange what there is," said Alison. "Let's be off, dear."

So they went into the kitchen, where they were at least warm and busy for an hour or so.

Presently they went to their own room to "sort themselves," as Janet would put it; "tidy themselves" an English Sarah or Mary Ann might use as an equivalent

But scarcely had they entered the room when Jessie gave a sudden start.

"Hark!" she exclaimed, "what's that!" and she stood still as stone, her bright eyes eager with listening, her sweet lips parted and fixed.

"It's only McQuade with the cart," said Alison, calmly.

Jessie darted to the window.

"Oh!" she cried with a thrill of the wildest joy in her voice, and a sudden fervent clap of her hands, "oh! it is—it is—it's Mac—it's Mac Carruthers!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MAC CARRUTHERS.

ART is irrepressible.

The Moorish followers of the Prophet, forbidden to adorn the walls of their mosques with figures, found room for the exercise of their artistic talents in elaborate arabesques: the lower orders of the Birrendale people display *their* artistic ingenuity on their door-steps.

Janet, having "redded" the step in front of Mrs. Bayliss's house, had carefully ornamented it with a device of many wavy lines, sharp ziz-zags, and irregular dots, boldly done in whiting

It was the one and only effort in pictorial art of which she was capable, and ought therefore to be treated with consideration; such efforts may be seen in any street on any Saturday afternoon in any Birrendale village.

When Mrs. Bayliss had cared how her house looked she had forbidden this display of talent; now she was too indifferent to notice it.

On this red step, with its grotesque ornamentation, Mr. Malcolm Carruthers, having rung the bell, the brass knob of which Janet had lately been rubbing up with the tenderest care, the door step and bell-knob being almost the only things belonging to the house in which she took any deep interest; on this red step, I repeat, Mr. Malcolm Carruthers, having rung the bell, stood in the bitter east wind, awaiting the opening of the door.

Malcolm Carruthers was a young man of twenty-four or thereabouts, who might be called either a Scotch-Englishman or an Anglo-Indian Scotchman; his father and himself having been born in India, their paternal relatives being Scotch, their maternal English.

Carruthers is a distinctly Border name, as common in Birrendale as Robinson in London. It has belonged to the locality from time immemorial and is said to be of Ancient British origin; indeed, as Mac himself often said: "My uncle traces back the family miles and miles beyond the Deluge; so no doubt Mac Carruthers owned an ancestry as much given to getting hanged at bonnie Carlisle as any young man who ever lived in the now most respectable and decorous old "reaving land."

Mac's uncle, with whom he was then living,

was a distinguished man in his county, no other, in fact, than Alexander Carruthers, Esq., the Laird of Muirhead, a considerable property a few miles from Cauldknowe; but Mac himself was by no means a remarkable person, except in the eyes of Jessie Carruthers and in those of his cousin, Alec, the only son of the Laird, with whom Mac was as grand an hero as any in a Border ballad. You might have passed Mac in the street without notice.

He was, however, a strongly built if not very finely finished young fellow. There was also a certain good-humoured kindness about his blunt features, and (as in the case of Jessie) on the slightest provocation, a merry, merry twinkle in his rather small eyes.

As he stood on that red-ochred door step, his expression was at that moment more suggestive of having faced a biting east wind than anything else; his natural beauty, never much at any time, was a good deal impaired just now by the redness of all the prominences of his face. He was buttoned up to the chin in a thick but very short riding jacket, and he held in his hand his hunting crop and his horse's bridle. His face was not towards the door, but towards his horse, to which he from time to time addressed observations not always of a complimentary

nature; and this, not because he was angry with the creature, but because he was feeling excessively nervous.

It was seldom that Mac felt nervous, but there are circumstances that upset the strongest of us.

The fact was, that Mac had not seen Jessie Bayliss for nearly five months.

Would Mac Carruthers then have been prepared to state solemnly that he was desperately in love with Jessie?

I am not sure he would. Certain it is that as he waited there—and they kept him it seemed a most unmerciful time—he felt over-excited, but not to the extent of losing his self-possession.

Now Jessie, as soon as she was sure that it was indeed Mac who was trotting up the avenue on his cousin's bay, delighted, overjoyed, as she was, was still capable of grappling with the urgent practical difficulty that arose at once.

"Alie! who's to open the door? Janet's just one coal by this time. You must go! Make haste—he's ringing!"

"No, no," said Alison, "you're tidier than I am."

"I will *not*," said Jessie, stamping her foot. "Go at once! Will you go? Oh, make haste!"

"But I'm not fit to be seen! Look at my sleeves?" said Alison.

"Yes, yes, you are—besides——"

"Besides, no one ever sees me, so it doesn't matter!" said Alison, as if finishing Jessie's sentence; and off she hurried, calling back as she went,

"Alas! Alas! for the boy Baird, and the hundred and fifty others!"

"Don't let him go! Mind you don't let him go! I'll be down directly!" Jessie called after her; tearing open a drawer, and beginning a frantic search for her neatest collar and cuffs.

"Mrs. Bayliss is at——?" Mac Carruthers asked, turning round sharply as the door was opened; then recognizing Alison he stopped shot, made a hurried grasp at his hat, succeeded in raising it a long way from his head, and went on:

"How do you do, Miss Bayliss? I'm afraid I've come over at an unconscionably early hour."

"Not at all," said Alison with a certain easy dignity, and apparently no more disconcerted than if she had met him in the drawing-room in a proper way.

"Not at all. Won't you come in? Mother is at home, she will be very pleased to see

you. I think Mc Quade is somewhere about; he'll take your horse. I'll send Janet to look for him."

"Thanks, but I mustn't stay five minutes. They won't wait lunch for me; but they'll expect me to be in to time. It was about those two rods, I wanted to see Mrs. Bayliss. She hasn't let them I hope?"

"I don't quite know," said Alison. "The Johnstones will be needing them, I think. But come in; that is, wait one moment till I fetch Janet. Oh, here's McQuade from the farm! I'll tell mother you're here, if you won't mind waiting for one instant," she turned quickly and went into the dining-room, where she found her mother still in the agonies of composition.

Mrs. Bayliss raised a flushed face to Alison.

"It's Mac Carruthers, mother," said Alison, in a half whisper, going up to Mrs. Bayliss's chair. "He's come to know about the fishing."

"Dear, dear, what a nuisance! Open the drawing-room shutters and let him go in there."

"Oh, let him come here, mother," pleaded Alison, "never mind the papers."

"Well, bring him in then. I suppose nothing matters now," said Mary, ungraciously.

"It is all quite nice," said Alison.

"But mind, I won't have him asked to lunch," said Mrs. Bayliss, gathering her papers together.

"No, no, of course not," said Alison, soothingly, half amused at the idea that such a meal as lunch still existed at their house. "There, that's all right, mother," and she went to the door again.

"Now, Mr. Carruthers," said she," "come in. I'm afraid you must have had a most uncomfortable ride."

"Awful! I got caught in a driving hail storm that nearly cut my face to bits; you see I haven't much left. Lovely place this to be out of! How do you do, Mrs. Bayliss?" and he shook the widow's hand with a good deal of grasp.

Mrs. Bayliss shrugged her shoulders.

"What was that, I heard you say as you came in?" she asked with a faint smile.

"I was saying—let me see—what was I saying? Oh, I know! I was saying"—and he took a chair and crushed his cap between his hands into as small a compass as possible—"I was saying this is a good place to be out of; and when you've seen another country or two you find it is!"

"And how is your cousin? You enjoyed

yourself at Nice, I suppose from your remark," said Mrs. Bayliss.

"I conclude we did, Mrs. Bayliss; and I've grown quite American, you see. Poor old Alec was right enough out there under the palms and with plenty to amuse him; but they would come back, they heard of that little spell of fine weather you had last month, and it was too much for them. Alec began to say he wearied to get home, and the others were wanted at Muirhead, so we came back. His cough's frightful again, poor old fellow. But it's about the fishing especially, I've ridden over. Now you haven't let it yet, I hope? I can't support life here without the fishing! Ours isn't of more than enough for my uncle and his friends. I like to feel independent."

"The fishing!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss, thoughtfully, as if another problem had suddenly cropped up for solution. "Well, I promised to give Major Johnstone the refusal," and she paused.

"The Johnstone's won't be back until the end of July—wise people! That's the beauty of having a big house here—one's never in it. I'd be quite willing to—to——"

Enter Jessie, in spotless cuffs and collar, freshly fluffed up hair, and a few primroses

fastened beside her broach ; so pretty, so trim, in such dainty order, for no masculine observer would note the radical shabbiness of her dress.

Up sprang Mr. Malcolm Carruthers to welcome this vision of beauty. He was not at all bashful by nature, but the frank pleasure in Jessie's bright hazel eyes was almost too much for him.

She held out her hand as if he and she had been friends for many years.

"And so you've come back already?" she said, with the slightest imaginable touch of the local accent. A little inflection of the voice, that was one of Jessie's many weapons of war ; not that she knew it. Mac Carruthers felt himself recompensed for all the hail-stones.

"Yes, they dragged us away, and Alec's all the worse for it. As for me, it doesn't much matter ; I'm as strong as an alligator."

"Have they told you we're just flitting South?" asked Jessie, taking up her knitting with admirable composure.

"How horrible!" exclaimed the young man, fervently. "How intensely disgusting!"

"I thought you said this was such a lovely place to be out of?" put in Alison, with a certain *naïveté*. "Why then should it be horrible for us to leave it?"

"Oh, it's a jolly place enough in summer

and autumn!" said he, "and the severest part of the spring is over now. Think what it will be in another month or so."

"Jessie's remark was rather premature; we are *only thinking* of going South," said Mrs. Bayliss. "It was that that made me hesitate about the fishing. Of course, if we let this place, the tenant will most probably take the fishing too."

"But *pro tem?* Mayn't I have it *pro tem?* Not if I promise to give it up at a minute's notice?" pleaded Mac, eagerly.

"With such a proviso I don't know why you should not," said Mrs. Bayliss, grandly. "But you see," she went on with a slight unbending, "you see, our plans, are at present so—so very indefinite."

"Not at all," put in Jessie, audaciously, "we are going to London at once. Where we hope to——"

"That is by no means certain," said Mrs. Bayliss, cutting Jessie short.

"So much the better for me and my rod!" said Mac, rising to depart. "Thank you very much."

"Remember me to Mrs. Carruthers," said Mrs. Bayliss, shaking hands, after which Mac wished her Good morning and went out of the room.

The girls followed him into the hall, considerately closing the door behind them, that Mrs. Bayliss might not feel a draught.

"You don't mean that you really are flitting?" Mac asked, seriously, of Jessie, as they stood beside the late Captain's Indian trophies. (Alison had kindly retired to the icy drawing-room.)

"But we just are," said Alison's cousin.

"No, but, I say! It won't do, you know!" protested Mac.

"Won't do! I was fit to jump over the house when it was settled," said Jessie.

"Then it is settled?" he asked, under his voice.

"Aye, it is," said Jessie.

"Then I must have a rod in the Birren every day, spate or no spate! The Birren's running *café au lait* at present; never mind, it's clearing, it will be all right to-morrow, see if it isn't! I shall be glad of a little quiet fishing just to give me time to think of——" he broke off suddenly. "Oh! the American girls at Nice," and he heaved a great sigh. "And the Vienese girls!" and he heaved another, "Did you ever see a Vienese girl?"

"Never a one," said Jessie; "how should I?—we go nowhere. Are they so wonderful?"

"Well, they are—" and Mac held up his hand and shook his head up and down, as if absolutely unable to find an English word adequate to express the charms of the fair daughters of the Austrian capital. "They're dreams! Visions! And they flirt—ah! *how* they flirt! And, what's more, they make you flirt with them! St. Anthony himself couldn't have resisted their wiles. They're just perfection!"

"Ah! the dear things! How nice! How dull you'll be fishing down by the brae-foot alone without them!" said Jessie, with mock gravity; at which Mac and she simultaneously burst out laughing, as if it were the drollest thing in the world. And they laughed, and laughed, and couldn't stop their laughter.

"Oh," said Jessie, when she could speak distinctly, "what a fine thing it is to have a really good laugh again! It's months and months since I've laughed."

"Surely the brilliant wit of the boy Baird must have made you merry often enough!" said Mac.

"You shan't make fun of him! He's been our only friend, and he didn't go away like some others we could mention."

"Won't you say you're glad to see me again?" asked Mac, turning his head a little

aside, and looking down at Jessie with as much sentiment as he could command.

"No, that I'll not!" returned Jessie, stoutly, her words positively dancing with delight.

"Then say you've been dull without me?"

"No, that I'll not!" repeated Jessie, with increasing fervour.

"Oh those Vienese girls!" exclaimed Mac, turning his eyes up to the ceiling. Why was I torn away from them by ruthless duty?" and he heaved another sigh that again set Jessie laughing such a pretty musical laugh that Mac was encouraged, laughing also, to say, touching one of the little flowers at her broach,

"Look here; I'm going to have those to punish you for not being glad to see me again!"

But Jessie was too quick for him, and shielded them with her hand, which gave rise to a little skirmish and more laughter, and more talk, very foolish talk, far too foolish to put on paper, but very, very delightful to both of those silly young people.

"And when did you come home?" presently asked Jessie.

"We got home yesterday evening, too late for me to dare to come over," said Mac.

"Then this is your first visit to anyone?" asked Jessie.

"Aye!" returned Mac.

"You're quite sure?" she asked with half a glance up at him.

"Sure! How can I be sure of anything when all my wits have gone out wool gathering? I can't stand so many blows! I thought —well, never mind; the idea of your leaving has quite crushed me. Why can't you stay? The weather will be splendid in a week or so—and I did think—but no matter!"

"We can't stay, because we haven't any money," said Jessie, simply.

"What could be more beautiful? Neither have I," returned Mac, lightly. "Say you won't go?—at least, not just yet."

Something in Mac's tone, as he spoke the last sentence, made Jessie's colour rise and her eye-lids veil the beautiful eyes.

She drew back a little from him.

"Won't you be late for lunch?" she said, very much under her voice, still retreating.

They were not engaged, nor indeed had there ever been anything more than this frivolous sort of play.

"You are glad to see me just one wee bit, though, aren't you?" asked Mac, with a touch of earnestness.

"I don't know," said Jessie, and paused. "I wish you'd go now, she went on, hurriedly. Why don't you go? Will you go?"

Then there was more foolish and delightful talk. But at last Mac opened the door; McQuade brought up the horse, and a few minutes later Mac disappeared down that path by the brae side, up which the poor Captain and Major Johnstone had sauntered on that autumn afternoon when the fatal cups of tea had been passed to them through the open drawing-room windows.

Oh light of heart was Mac Carruthers as he faced the piercing wind once more!

As for Jessie she, after gazing out of window for a few minutes, sought out Alison, and to her she said, turning right away from her and looking at the opposite wall:

"Alie, must we really go to London? Are we obliged to go? It's very nice here in the fine weather. Isn't it possible to stay, somehow or another? I don't feel as if I wanted to leave Birrendale just yet. I'm like Auntie, I don't think I *can* go. I wish that letter had not come."

"And only just now you were imploring me to take you away!" exclaimed Alison.

"Yes; but how was I to know?" asked Jessie in return.

CHAPTER IX.

A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE.

LET us return to Arnold Birkett.

We left him at the corner of Barking Alley, Tower hill, within a good stone's throw of John Harbuckle's house in the north-west angle of Trinity Square. He stood for a moment on or very near the spot where in the middle of last century they cut off old Lord Lovat's grey but not particulary honourable head; on which occasion the scaffold fell in, killing a good many of the people who were tippling at the bar that was doing a roaring trade underneath it.

Arnold Birkett's mind was, however, far too deeply engrossed in his own affairs for any historical association to have the slightest interest for him; besides which he could not well recall this edifying circumstance, because he did not know it had ever occurred.

He looked as he felt, ill and grievously shaken; but he made a great effort to rouse himself.

"I must remember," he told himself, "I must remember she was always delicate. Under the most favourable circumstances she could never have been a strong woman; and who shall say whether an early death is not better than a long weak life? Not that hers, poor darling, could never have been a long one; I'm more and more convinced it never could have been! But how could I help it?"

Was he conscious that he was trying to shelter himself under some subterfuge? Was he making the best of a bad case, before a conscience that refused to be deluded? He seemed, if it were so, to get but poor consolation from the attempt. Perhaps the stern judge within would have none of his specious pleading, or scorned to accept as an axiom, that necessity knows no law.

In spite of all excuses, he felt conscience-stricken and heart-sick, as he walked a short distance westward, through the busy streets.

Presently, feeling very cold and wretched, he turned into one of the many city dining-rooms.

He found a warm corner, where he took a basin of soup and some brandy, with great deliberation, while the other men who crowded the place were dispatching more substantial refreshments, at a rate perfectly unattainable

to those who have not for years accustomed themselves to getting their mid-day meal in from five to ten minutes.

"A herd of many swine feeding," said Birkett to himself, grimly, as he began his own slight refection. "'Tisn't a lovely sight, but what would I give to be able to follow their example as once I could! Paugh! How sick I am of everything! How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable it is to me! All this eager hurry and bustle, what's the use of it?"

Two men behind him, having snatched a hasty meal, rushed off together in a great state of excitement.

"Happy beings, they've still something left to fight for! Happy any man who finds an object engrossing enough to take him out of himself, even if it's only shellac! I suppose I shall have to go into business again. One must keep on living."

Slightly warmed and refreshed, he went out again and wandered about the business lanes that lead out of Tower Street, and mingled with the crowd of merchants and brokers, hovering about the Commercial Sale Rooms, and found his way among the mysterious passages between the streets, where men were rushing to and fro with samples of drugs, or bundles of catalogues of forthcoming sales.

No one spoke to him, no one recognized him.

But after a while, among these busy throngs, his own footsteps quickened in sympathy. A kind of magnetic attraction held him to the place, a sense of being at home once more made him linger, a longing to throw himself again into the battle of life came upon him as he saw others fighting.

"It's no use," he said, "I must get into business again. I *will* get into business again. Who can tell? I might even yet be able to set myself right with the world, which is possible, if not with myself, which is impossible. Ah! if once I had had but half the money I have now, how different it might all have been! It seems all but useless, now. Is anything worth striving for? Yet a man must strive; how can one be idle among all these busy men, and how can a man who has so long been in business keep away from it? There's an old name—and there—and there. Those people have built new premises, I see. So-and-so seems to have taken a fresh partner," he went on, gradually becoming more and more interested with what he saw.

"Shall I go boldly to John Harbuckle, and tell him everything?" he asked himself presently. "He knows where my Jessie is.

I suppose it will come to that some time or another. Why not at once? No, I can't; I cannot. Am I radically a coward?—There are men I can't face. He's one of them."

The dining-room of the Tavistock is not very unlike the coffee-room. It is the fashion in that old established house to have the joints on wheeled tables for the better pleasing of those who are fastidious as to their cut of beef or mutton.

The waiter found Mr. Birkett difficult to please on the evening of this particular day; and no sooner had that most obliging functionary started to attend to some else, than Mr. Birkett called him back.

"Here, take that away," he said, shivering. "Let me have a large pot of strong tea and some toast, at once."

"You appear to feel this weather keenly," remarked the man who occupied the seat facing Arnold Birkett. It was the first sentence that had been spoken to him since he had landed, except by the hotel people.

"Why, yes," he returned. "It's the very opposite to the climate I've been accustomed to for many years past. Sho-o-o!" with a another shiver. "These east winds are dreadful, they go right through and through me."

"Through any one who hasn't the hide of

a rhinoceros or some other pachy-what-do-you-call-it creature! And you, I presume, have just come from the tropics. Pardon me, but as I see you are wearing a Zodiac ring, I'll venture to guess you've been recently on the West Coast of Africa."

"Your guess is correct. Yes, I've managed to put in eight years in that delightful place, with only two breaks of four months each at Madeira. You've seen these rings before?" asked Birkett, twisting, as he spoke, a golden circlet from which the signs of the Zodiac stood out in high relief, round and round as he spoke.

"I've made a trip to the Cape many years since," returned the other, whose name I may as well say here was Tildesley, "and staying a few days at Madeira on my way home I noticed that all the men from the West Coast (and I met a good many there) wore those rings. I don't think I've seen them anywhere else."

"They are a speciality of our part of the world," said Birkett, "I suppose the Mohammedans introduced them."

"You don't mean to say you have Mohammedans out there?" exclaimed Tildesley, who had been steadily working through an excellent dinner, from oysters to gorganzola,

the last morsel of which he took as soon as he had asked the question.

"Thousands, I should say," returned Birkett. "Very superior people, too, quite the best of the native tribes; clothes wearers, and clean as well as picturesque."

"Two good qualities not often found together," interpolated Tilderley.

"As I have found to my cost only too often," said Birkett, really quite delighted to have any one to talk to; for in spite of his melancholy he was an essentially social being, with a great natural liking for society. "These Mandingo fellows, for the Mohammedans belong nearly all of them to the Mandingo tribe, are really fine men. They wear cloaks something like a priest's robe, with wide sleeves, and as white as snow. The innocent whiteness of those robes does not, however, prevent their being excellent receptacles for stolen goods."

"Then they've always a cloak for their sins. Ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Tildesley.

Mr. Birkett laughed also, a good-natured laugh, and he looked straight across the table into Tildesley's face, with eyes brightened for an instant with a pleasant light evidently peculiar to them. It was a something quite individual by which, if once noticed, you might easily have recognized Birkett again. It lasted

only for an instant, yet it made Tildesley interested in him. It was one of Mr. Birkett's peculiarities that people always were interested in him, and always wanted to know more about him.

"The African climate doesn't seem to have injured you much," Tildesley went on, after a short chuckle over his wretched pun. "(Waiter, you can bring me some tea—); I thought the Coast was the white man's grave?"

"You wouldn't think it but know it, if you'd lived there," said Birkett. "You dine with a man on Sunday and go to his funeral on Monday."

"Sharp work!" ejaculated Tildesley.

"Sharp indeed! I've had considerably over a hundred doses of fever myself, and during the last attack I heard them order my coffin, and remark that I should make a good corpse; so I determined not to risk another; although, climate apart, the Coast life suits me; it's so pleasant to feel you're making money quickly."

"Ah, it must be! It must be! That unfortunately is a feeling one seldom knows in London, very seldom indeed. Ah!"

And Mr. Tildesley sighed a long drawn sigh, and shook his head with a dolefulness

that contrasted rather odd with his eminently prosperous appearance. He was short, stout, with a shining bald head, a spotless white cravat, an expanse of magnificent shirt-front, and other indications of a dress suit under the grey over-coat.

"Ah!" he continued with another sigh. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me how money is quickly made in any part of the world just now? Not, of course, if it's a trade secret."

"No secret," said Birkett, easily; "although times aren't even with us what they were a few years ago. Competition has reached even us; but then you see fever kills off so many of our competitors that the staying horse is bound to win."

"Ha! and you've been a staying horse, I suppose?" asked Mr. Tildesley, stroking his carefully shaven chin as he looked up at Birkett rather keenly.

"To a certain extent, yes; I've seen the last of a good many," replied Birkett, in a tone that invited further questioning.

"Know London?"

"My knowledge of London is like our Coast fever, intermittent. I have vague childish memories of it. When I was a young man I was again in London for a few months

(but that, as I need not tell you, is now many years ago), and I returned from Africa only yesterday."

"I'm happy to have met with you. It's something to have sat by a man who's had a hundred odd fevers and got over them. Are you making a long stay at this house?—if so I'll call. My name's Tildesley, Dunster Court, Mincing Lane and 'Crow's Nest,' Lambrooke."

The two men exchanged cards.

"Thanks," said Birkett, as he put Tildesley's card into his case. "I shall be here at any rate for a fortnight, and I shall be very pleased to see you. May I call upon you in the City?"

"Do," said Tildesley, "I shall be delighted to see you. I'm seldom out long together, choose your own time. I expect Mrs. Tildesley and my son and his wife directly; we're going to hear 'Madame Angot,' with some friends from Liverpool. What will you do with yourself?"

"Oh, I shan't venture out again; I'll get up a roaring fire in my room and turn in early; perhaps I may stave off the attack I feel is hovering about me."

Here, Mr. Tildesley's son came in and announced that "the others" were waiting in the brougham.

"Well, good night to you," said the elder

Tildesley, rising and buttoning up his overcoat. "I hope you'll be better to-morrow. I say, look me up in the City to-morrow, if you can!"

"I will," said Birkett, with another of those gleams of light in his eyes. "May you all have a pleasant evening!"

So they parted.

"Is that man to be trusted?" was the first question each one asked himself a moment afterwards.

"Liverpool people, eh?" said Birkett to himself, as he went upstairs to his own room. "I think I'd rather not see any Liverpool people just yet. What's the good?"

Again, as on the evening before, his meditations by the roaring fire, as he sat in the great chintz-covered chair, all bright with poppies and cornflowers, seemed, to judge by his expression, far from consolatory.

Again he took out the portraits, again he kissed them; was it a form, a habit, a long established custom, begun when they were fresh but fading with them?

This evening he lingered over all that was left of the portrait of the little girl:

"Shall I look for her?" he asked.

After a long pause, he answered:

"Not yet! Not yet! It won't do yet!

Let me see what turns up here first. Having waited so long, let me wait until——"

And he went off into a region of thought, where we cannot follow him.

"Am I an arrant coward? Ah, there are things that the boldest man couldn't face if he had a vestige of conscience left."

"I must know what has become of her!" he said at last. "She is all I have left to me in this world. In this world! How do I know? Perhaps she, too, is gone. John Harbuckle could tell me. He knows. Come what may I'll call on him to-morrow! He has no reason to love me, I admit; and yet, it's strange, but so it is, he's the only man I feel I can trust. I'll call on John Harbuckle to-morrow."

Not without much inward strife did Arnold Birkett come to this determination. The agitation of the whole day and the keen east wind now began to tell alarmingly upon him. A few minutes later, he was shuddering over the fire with African ague.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRANSITION PERIOD.

JOHN HARBUCKLE could not settle down after that upheaval of his deepest affections.

By force of habit he managed to attend to his business much as usual, but no sooner had he left his office than a restless spirit took possession of him.

No longer could he sit by the hour, writing antiquarian letters; no longer could he take pleasure in the discussions of the "Earth-Worms," that celebrated Club in Great Turner Street, with whose members he had spent so many a happy evening; no longer was the chairmanship of the "Young Men's Christian Association" sufficient to fill the place in his heart, which he now felt, more acutely than ever, was empty.

The Birrendale people kept him waiting for a day longer than was necessary. He could not settle down to anything; he spent two evenings in wandering about the London

streets. At other times, he rarely went ten yards without finding some fresh object of interest, now he walked along, scarcely seeing anything except that circumstance of four and twenty years ago, and what had come of it; the circumstance that to his mind was expressed by the one word "Jessie."

The Jessie he remembered was the mother of that very pretty girl in Birrendale. She had been pretty, too, but her beauty had been of a gentler, less vigorous type than her daughter's.

It was she who had lived in Catherine Court. Perhaps the City air did not suit her; she was always fragile and delicate there. To John Harbuckle that had been one of her charms. She was younger than he. As a child, she used to play with his sister Mary, who was the youngest of the family. John Harbuckle had always been very fond of Jessie of Catherine Court. As she grew up his love for her increased. She was accustomed to seeing him; she thought she loved him. They used to stroll about the Tower Gardens together of an evening. They were, at last, to have been married in a few weeks; he had taken a house out of town, thinking she might grow stronger in the country air.

But they never went into that house.

Mary Harbuckle was then engaged to James Bayliss, whom she had met when staying with some friends near Woolwich.

Mary was rather a pretty blonde in those days.

One evening, John Harbuckle and his Jessie were sitting on the bench under the acacias that face the Beauchamp Tower, talking of their new home with quiet happy contentment, when they saw Mary and James and, for the first time, Arthur Bayliss, the brother of James. Arthur Bayliss was a tall, handsome man, very much his brother's superior, and with singularly attractive ways.

Poor Jessie soon found out that her liking for John Harbuckle was only a calm affectionate regard. She wrote him an honest letter. She told him all, offered still to marry him if he would not release her. He could not marry her without her love ; so she became the wife of Arthur Bayliss, who was then the head of the prosperous Liverpool firm his father had created.

John Harbuckle heard little of them for some years. Then came rumours of trouble and disaster. At last, opening the *Times* one morning, he saw the announcement of the death of an Arthur Bayliss, of Liverpool, and a

day or two later the same announcement, with the addition of the full address and—this important item:

"Drowned, in the foundering of the African mail steamer, 'Mellicurrie.'"

There were in the paper of that and the preceding two or three days the announcements of several other deaths by the same casualty, together with the details of the wreck as given by the only survivor, the mate.

John Harbuckle, who had a book of carefully-arranged newspaper cuttings, kept that announcement.

From Captain Bayliss, who had just returned from India with little more than his pay, John Harbuckle heard soon afterwards that Jessie and her one little girl were entirely dependent upon her brother-in-law.

As soon as he well could he called on Jessie. He found her ill in mind and body, and in widow's weeds. With infinite gentleness he asked her again to be his wife, offering to wait her time, however long it might be. She turned upon him with such shrinking horror in her face as he had never dreamed of before; he could but think that grief had turned her brain. She died a few months later, and Captain and Mrs. Bayliss took her little girl to live with them.

Then a legacy was left to Arthur Bayliss. Captain James, was the next of kin. He took that as well as the little girl, throwing it away upon Cauldknowe, and was now himself dead.

Such is a brief outline of the history on which John Harbuckle meditated as he wandered up and down the London streets.

Is it to be wondered at that he thought more of Jessie Bayliss than of any of the others in Birrendale? There was to him something very sacred and solemn and yet romantic in the thought that he should now have to shelter that girl, that daughter of his lost Jessie, from the hardships that without his protection she would have to endure.

"A very dear girl! A very dear girl! And Her daughter! "They ought not to have lost a post. I hope I shan't have trouble with them! But Mary's difficult to deal with; she always was, poor thing, even James felt so at times. If there isn't a letter this morning, I shall go at once; I cannot bear this suspense," he said to himself as he went down to breakfast, the third morning after his letter had been posted.

John Harbuckle's dining table proper being now entirely covered with books and papers which none dared to touch, breakfast had

been laid for him on a small, straight-legged Chippendale affair, that had been drawn up near the fire, as the morning, though bright, was chilly.

The arrangements of the meal were to the thinking of Mr. and Mrs. Robbins and of John Harbuckle himself admirable.

The damask cloth was shining and spotless; the old silver tea-pot warmly muffled in a thick cosy; the great blue china cup still unchipped; the *Times* and letters waiting to be read beside it; the fish, eggs and toast done to a turn, the only chair that was not laden with books drawn up to the fire; and a pot of choice red tulips flaming in the centre of the table amidst a morning sunbeam that entered the room through a south-east window.

This was a little picture John Harbuckle's eyes had often rested upon with pleasure. To-day it struck him that that picture was after all but still life, mere *genre*. It lacked something—no, somebody.

He took up the letters with nervous eagerness. At last there was one with the Kirkhope postmark.

"But not in Mary's hand," he said, "I'm afraid I shall have trouble with Mary!"

He opened the note, it was only a very brief one from Alison:

"Cauldknowe, by Kirkhope,
"Birrendale.
"April 12th, 187—

"DEAR UNCLE JOHN,

"My mother requests me to thank you for your kind letter. We shall be happy to see you here as soon as you can make it convenient to come.

"The weather is extremely cold, so be sure you wear your warmest clothes.

"Hoping to see you soon, and with best love from all of us,

"I am, dear Uncle John,
"Your affectionate niece,
"ALISON BAYLISS."

Not much of a letter, truly, but what a work it had been to get it off! What a quantity of Alison's scribbling paper had gone behind the fire, covered with Mrs. Bayliss' writing, before she had consented to her daughter's doing the business for her.

Uncle John read a great deal more between the lines than in them; but even he little knew what battles had been fought over nearly every important word.

"Now, I shall have to be firm with Mary," he said, "the thing of all others I detest being when dealing with a woman. She'll never forgive me; but duty is duty. I see mine

clearly in this case, and I am not going to be thwarted. Mary and the girls must come here, at least until we can see what next is to be done. But I foresee trouble! I never yet have been able to fight a woman. How complicated life grows as soon as you introduce the domestic element! Dear, dear, dear me!"

That note spoiled his breakfast. He read the few lines many times. He could not like them; they certainly were not Alison's.

"I'll go North by the night mail," he said.

"I'd go this morning only I can't put off 'Hartington's affair.' Let me think: to-day's Friday, I must be here on Wednesday to meet Rogers and South. "I can just manage it. I must go to Glasgow on Monday and settle up that wretched business with the money lender. I don't like it. It's a dead loss, however, the quicker it's done the better. No, I'm not going to let Mary ruin me; although I've no doubt that is what Mary would call doing my duty. I'll send Mary a telegram. I'll tell her to expect me to breakfast to-morrow. I'll send it off at once."

After a short search he found a form, and sent the message to the post office by the hand of the trusty Robbins, who lost no time

in conveying its wording to his wife, as soon as he returned.

The suspicions of the worthy couple had already been aroused by John Harbuckle's abnormal behaviour. Mr. and Mrs. Robbins were now convinced that, to use their own expression,“ something was hup.”

As the old bachelor saw the door close upon Mr. Robbins, he became exceedingly conscious that he had indeed crossed the Rubicon. He stood on his hearth-rug with his back to the fire and surveyed the room, where for so many years he had reigned supreme, with a fond regret. He felt his mastership was fast coming to a close.

“It's all over!” he said, shaking his grey head. “It's all come to an end! What would Mary say to that table full of books? They shall all go upstairs. I'll have a den there—but it will never be this one! Never!”

His glance fell on some old Wedgwood plaques he had bought a day or two before the upheaval. They were lying among a number of catalogues and papers on the top of a bureau. He went to them. “Soft as velvet;” he said, passing his fingers over the surface of one of them, with almost a caressing tenderness. “Better than I thought they were. Those figures are Flaxman's! Ah!

All that little game's nearly over! Woolcomb may have these for what I gave for them. I know he wants them."

Then he took up a small jar of the same material, the surface of which was gently rippled. With even greater tenderness he passed his finger up and down over the little undulations. "How soft! How exquisitely soft!" he said; the sense of touch awakening long passed associations. "How like her hand!"

Robert Browning tells us of:

> "Etrurian circlets found, some happy morn,
> After a dropping April found alive,
> Spark-like, 'mid unearthed slope-side fig-tree roots,
> That roof old tombs at Chuisi."

"*Found alive, spark-like,*" after ages of burial! so alive and so spark-like was John Harbuckle's unearthed love for the girl that once had lived in Catherine Court, the Jessie he had wooed and lost in the Tower Gardens.

He put the jar down with a sigh, crossed the passage and went into the drawing-room. It had hardly been used since his mother's death, nor indeed in any conventional sense for some years before that lamented event.

John Harbuckle had found it a handy place for putting away such old furniture and curious books and rare china as he could not cram

into his dining-room. On rainy evenings, when he did not care either to go out or to write antiquarian letters, he had been very fond of prowling about that room; he had a great affection for his things, and as he generally kept Mr. Robbins at work on them, he had always found enough to do in arranging what was to be done. Nor had it been merely selfish pleasure. He and his man not unfrequently, by dint of mending and polishing, often rendered tables, chairs and cabinets very acceptable presents for newly-married people of good taste; and he generally had on hand an old carved oak chest or two, new centuries since: "When ancient dames chose forth brocade—when reds and blues were indeed red and blue," but still very useful for holding a more perishable modern trousseau; such chest he had found very generally appreciated by the daughters of several of his friends; they made an agreeable variety to card baskets and dressing bags, as wedding presents. He took a deep and genuine interest in young married—or about to be married—people.

"I'll have those two done up for the girls," he said; "the other things—ah! Mary will say I've turned the place into a broker's shop—I shall have to make some sort of a clearance, and I hate clearing up! I suppose I

must sell these things and buy a new piano, and fashionable jim-cracks."

Poor John Harbuckle! I am afraid that his sister Mary cast a very cold shadow before her, a shadow that fell on him and chilled him.

Perhaps it was because he had been looking at those old chests, and thinking they would suit the girls; perhaps it was that ever since he had heard that voice from the cab his mind had been so full of one subject; perhaps because the soft ripples of the Wedgwood jar had felt to his touch so like a long vanished hand; but just as he re-entered his dining-room, for one fraction of a second, he saw a shadowy form of a girl sitting on the window settle half hidden by the faded crimson curtains.

He was not at all surprised. Jessie of Catherine Court had been there times without number. He only thought it would be very sweet to come up from the office now and then and find her daughter, real and living, sitting there.

It was astonishing, even to himself, how the image of Jessie Bayliss had grown in his mind these last few days.

He again took up his place on the rug. He had not yet, so preoccupied had he been, looked over the *Times*. There it lay, still

folded, on the table; part of the first column and the date, April 11th, exposed to view.

John Harbuckle's thoughts presently reached a point at which to look at that paper, with its first column and its date, seemed by natural and unforced sequence the next step.

"April 11th! Then Monday was the 7th! I remember that was the date I wrote on my letter to Mary. The 7th! That's curious!"

He crossed over to the Wedgwood plaques, and having moved them, unearthed the book containing his newspaper cuttings, on which they had been lying.

He carefully turned over the pages until he came upon this:

"On the 7th of April, drowned in the foundering of the African mail steamer, 'Mellicurrie,' Arthur Bayliss, of —— Street, Liverpool."

"That's curious, very curious," said John Harbuckle. "The 7th of April, eight years ago! Well, well; a coincidence, a mere coincidence! Eight years ago! Exactly eight years! Curious, very curious! It's time I was in the office. I shall have several things to arrange to-day. But that date and that voice is certainly a strange coincidence! I shan't mention it to Mary. She'll have a theory to account for it at once."

On the stairs, John Harbuckle met Mr. Robbins, who asked him, what bag or portmanteau he would like for the journey.

He told him briefly and went on, feeling suddenly half ashamed of himself and uncertain whether he were not going to treat Mr. and Mrs. Robbins rather shabbily.

He arranged for his few days' absence, and returned in the evening to his nest, feeling that he must give Robbins a preparatory hint before starting for Scotland. This weighed heavily upon him; his well-served dinner affected him as a silent reproach from Mrs. Robbins, his carefully-packed travelling bag was, as it were, coals of fire heaped by Robbins himself upon his master's guilty head.

"Back on Wednesday to breakfast did you say, sir?" asked Robbins, as he pulled the collar of John Harbuckle's overcoat straight.

"On Wednesday to breakfast," returned the perfidious old bachelor, as if oppressed with a grievous burden. "To breakfast," he repeated. "And, perhaps—O, hem! I had better tell you that my widowed sister, and her—and my nieces are thinking of coming to stay here shortly."

"Oh, indeed, sir!" was Mr. Robbins' audible remark.

"The house is rather crowded with things;

I'm afraid—I'm afraid we shall have to make a new arrangement," said John Harbuckle, unpleasantly conscious that to his own mind, at least, the last sentence could be taken in two ways.

"The ladies will make things a bit pleasant for you, sir," remarked Robbins, blandly. "Will they be staying long?"

"I can't tell, I can't tell at all. I hope so."

"Cab, sir? It's a nasty night; better have one."

"Very well," assented Mr. Harbuckle, thankful to be rid of the man's presence; so a few minutes later he was duly packed off to catch his train for the North.

"Pore old chap," observed Mr. Robbins, when he had related the news to his wife; "pore old chap! Don't he look as if he was going to be 'anged, that's all."

"Serve him right, the mean scoundrel!" exclaimed Mrs. Robbins. "Ladies, indeed! Not if I know it! Ladies, indeed!—the mean creatures! Don't talk to me, I'm up to their tricks, and I can't abide 'em, and, what's more, I won't! Me stay in the house with Mrs. B. for my missis! No, thank you, no missis for me! And the way we've slaved after him, too! Well I did think better of him, that I did! Talk of gratitood! Poof!"

John Harbuckle, as he was whirled through the Midlands, had an uncomfortable feeling that some such remark had been made about him, and he could not rise to a cheerful view of the situation.

The long night journey made him still more depressed. Daybreak among the Westmoreland hills soothed him a little; his spirits sank again as he crossed the dead levels by the side of the cold grey Solway; they were at zero when he alighted at the shabby little station of Kirkhope.

There he found a walk of a couple of miles before him; for the much besplashed little omnibus, that later in the day awaited the trains, had not yet made its appearance.

The aspect of everything was dreary and unlovely in the extreme. The sky was leaden grey, there was a biting wind.

John Harbuckle crossed the cobble stones of the wide High Street of Kirkhope, and struck into a fine, hard turn pike road, running between beech-hedges, with here and there plantations of spruce, fir and larch.

After he had walked about two miles with the wind in his face, he came to the avenue of rhododendrons that led to Mrs. Bayliss's house, and soon afterwards found himself on the red door-step, with the white

lines and dots, and, a minute later, before the blazing fire in the dining-room of Cauldknowe, where the cloth was already laid for breakfast.

Early as it was, Mrs. Bayliss had gone round to the farm. The two girls were in the kitchen preparing breakfast. Happily the scones had the moment before been transferred to their dish, and carefully wrapped up in shining white damask, so that without delay Alison and Jessie were able to run off to welcome uncle John, whom they found trying to warm his hands by a fire which had hardly been lighted long enough to have much heat in it.

Alison, who held in affectionate memory his few words anent her "Border Towers" ran in looking very much delighted.

"Well, my dear child!" said John Harbuckle, in hardly so slow a tone as was usual with him.

"Dear uncle John, I'm so very very glad to see you again!" exclaimed Alison, who was an extremely warm-hearted girl, kissing him with a genuine welcome. "How cold and hungry you must be!"

"It looks very winterly here still, my dear —Ah, Jessie!" and he put out his hand to her, but without taking it she kissed him, just

as Alison had done, and called him "Dear uncle John."

"That voice! I hear it again in hers!" passed through John Harbuckle's brain, as Jessie's "Dear uncle John," reached his ear.

CHAPTER XI.

JESSIE WILL PLAY.

"YOUR mother, Alison?" John Harbuckle asked, when their greeting was over.

"She's gone across to the farm," said Alison. "She always goes first thing in the morning, but we are rather earlier than usual, because we were expecting you. There now, let me draw this arm-chair to the fire, and do try if you cannot get warm." Alison pushed a great chair up to the fire as she spoke.

But John Harbuckle had gone to the window, and was looking out on the knotty lawn and at the opening in the woods, no longer clear cut but overhung with unlopped branches, through which the Birren was to be seen, still rushing down to meet the Solway. "Very winterly!" he said, aloud.

"A dear girl! A very dear girl! How like her poor mother she's grown. But it's his voice and his eyes," was the thought that had driven him to the window.

"I wish it only *would* look winterly," exclaimed Alison. "It was lovely in the winter time; while you were having those dreadful fogs in London, the sun was bright and clear as if it were summer. Why, one day in Christmas week, when we were having lunch at the Johnstones, and someone was telling us that in London they were burning gas all day, I could see, as I sat at table, the Solway shining like silver in the distance; and the sun was so bright they had to let down the dining-room blind half-way."

"Then you wouldn't like to go to foggy London?" asked Mr. Harbuckle, turning round.

"Oh, uncle John, it's the dream of our lives!" said Alison.

"And Alison's going to write all the London novels that Sir Walter hadn't time to get done!" cried Jessie.

John Harbuckle opened his eyes, which were of a good clear blue, and remarked:

"You don't say so!"

"Yes indeed, and I'm to be the heroine!" Jessie went on.

"And a very nice heroine too—a very nice heroine too!" And John Harbuckle's straight, shrewd lips parted with a kindly smile as he retreated to the fire and the arm-chair, and

surveyed both the girls with evident interest and approval.

"Very nice! So you'll think when you've tasted my scones!" laughed Jessie. "I'm going to fetch them, the neat wee things! they're just a picture to look at!"

"Like their fabricator," said the worthy John Harbuckle, slowly and quietly, as if stating the driest fact.

"Thanks," Jessie threw back from the door; "pretty speeches don't often come my way." And she vanished as Alison had already done.

"More vivacious than poor mother ever was!" sighed John Harbuckle, as he leaned forward with his broad palms outstretched to the blaze for some minutes, all alone.

Then the girls came back.

He looked up, they were busy about the room; both, to him, very charming, with their little red and black plaid shawls pinned over their shoulders.

"Now, uncle John, mother won't mind our beginning before she comes in," said Alison, when all was arranged. "She said we were not to wait; she'll be back directly. There, now, what do you think of Jessie's scones?"

"I'll tell you better in a minute or two; Mrs. Robbins has made me over fastidious,"

said he, drawing his chair up to the table, and choosing one of Jessie's "neat wee things," which he buttered and tasted with critical deliberation. "Mrs. Robbins must hide her diminished head, Jessie," he said, when he had formed his opinion. "These homely cakes please me better than all her divers subtleties in the way of sweets. You will make them for me sometimes?"

"Perhaps," said Jessie. "Is it quite settled that we are to go?"

"Quite settled as far as I am concerned," returned John Harbuckle. "Do you think I could face my solitary hearth after having been an actor in this charming scene? No; I shall want scones and my nieces every morning with my breakfast. Rooms look very empty without girls; nothing else furnishes them."

"Then you are only going to consider us as goods and chattels?" asked Jessie, with a slight pretence at displeasure.

"My dear child! girls are the most valuable creatures in the world!" said uncle John, as if deprecating Jessie's last remark.

"I'm thankful to hear it," said Jessie.

They had just finished breakfast when Mrs. Bayliss arrived.

"Well, John!"

"Well, Mary!" then followed a kiss by no means demonstrative.

"A bitter wind, John."

"Take this chair by the fire, Mary. You look 'nipped up.'"

"No, I won't turn you out; besides, I rarely sit near the fire. I'm used to being in the cold by this time," said Mary, taking off her hat and shawl and then sitting at the end of the table.

She looked then neither lovely nor amiable. Her usual bald effect was heightened by the want of her cap and hemstitched collar, which Jessie perceiving went to fetch, she, although herself, seemed quite callous about her appearance. "Nothing mattered now," she said only too often.

The presence of her brother at that time was far from soothing, it was an offence to her. She drank her first cup of coffee amidst a silence no one dared to disturb.

Jessie came in with the cap, collar and cuffs, but Mary, although she saw them plainly enough, did not attempt to take them from her niece. So they had to repose on the sofa.

Jessie went to her place at the table and the silence grew profound as well as irksome.

Presently Mrs. Bayliss put her hand into

her pocket, and drew out a little packet enclosed in a newspaper wrapper.

"Here, Alison," she said, handing the packet to Jessie *en route* to the person to whom it was addressed, "this is for you; it's the only thing the post-man brought this morning."

Alison, who was in the act of pouring out Jessie's second cup, filled it much too full.

She took the packet and hurriedly tearing off the wrapper, unrolled two long strips of printed paper, at the sight of which she flushed up to the very roots of her hair.

"Your proof, Alison?" asked John Harbuckle.

"I suppose so," she returned, under her breath, looking at the strips that curled about as if alive, with eyes that had suddenly grown very bright with amazement and delight.

She had heard of "proofs" of course, but that a real "proof" should ever be addressed to her was something too wonderful; it quite dazed her for the moment.

Uncle John looked at her with deep interest. "Your 'Border Towers?'" he asked.

She found the heading; sure enough it was her own paper—her very own! She wanted to rush away with it at once, and make the acquaintance of this first child of her brain,

and pen in the secrecy of her own room ; but there she was inexorably tied to the breakfast-table ; she could not get away.

"Accept my congratulations, my dear," said John Harbuckle, kindly.

"Ah ! your poor father had bitter cause to lament that ever he saw a proof," sighed Mrs. Bayliss. "I hope, Alison, your literary career may be a brighter one than his."

But Alison hardly heard this remark, so intent was she upon reading here and there a well-remembered sentence, which brought to her the conviction that those printed words were indeed her very own.

"You bring good luck, uncle John," she said, presently, turning her bright face, still trembling with amazement, to him.

"Well, well, let's take this as a good omen," said he. "London will be a vast field for you."

"I'm sure I shall be thankful for success of any kind," sighed Mrs. Bayliss. "Alison, my dear," she added, trying to speak kindly, "I see you're anxious to go over that. Tell Janet to light the drawing-room fire ; uncle John and I have a good deal to talk over."

Thus dismissed Alison went off, Jessie following close behind her.

"Look here, Alison," said Jessie, as soon as they were in the hall, "don't trouble about

the drawing-room, I'll see to that, you be off to our room, you'll not feel cold, I'm sure."

So Alison went to her room, shut to the door, fell down on her knees with the proof in her hand all waving about, gave thanks with the most devout and tender joy; and a faint sunbeam stole out from under the grey clouds and fell upon her, and warmed her as she knelt there. Never if she lives to patriarchal age; never, should it be given her to write world-famous books, will she forget with what happy maternal gratitude she read through her first proof.

Jessie did not like being left unprotected, so instead of returning to the breakfast table she went into the drawing-room, where she employed herself in putting things to rights, and in trying to make up her mind whether or not she wanted to go to London, and whether she were glad or not that Mac Carruthers had come back.

"Eminent literary lady, may I come in?" she called, tapping at Alison's door, after the lapse of half-an-hour or so, during which time Alison had read through her proof three times, and finding several phrases needing correction, had resolved to consult uncle John on the all important matter of getting them right.

"Oh—come in!" answered Alison, with

another blush; for on points on which she was sensitive the slightest word made her quiver.

"But I'm so dreadfully frightened, talented authoress!" called Jessie through the key-hole in mock terror.

"Illustrious heroine, will you enter—or will you be an idiot?" returned Alison. Thus adjured, Jessie came in, to find Alison standing by the window with the strips of paper still in her hands.

"Mrs. Jellaby, please am I to do all the work of Bleak House this morning? If I may venture to ask so practical a question," said Jessie. "Come, you must have read those curly-whirlies by this time."

"I do believe Mr. Baird has been altering some of my sentences!" exclaimed Alison; a suspicion she had had for some time suddenly becoming conviction.

"Oh, the traitor! won't I pay his boy out for it!" said Jessie; "but really Alison, it's getting late, it's just upon nine; let's get tidied up a bit, before Auntie and uncle John begin to run all over the place. Come Mrs. Jellaby!"

"You shan't call me bad names. I'm sure I'm always tidying up! I make a much better pudding than you do, although you are

professionally a domestic woman and I'm not; —but—I wish Mr. Baird hadn't altered my sentences!"

"Improved as well as altered them."

"Perhaps; but I like them to be mine!, 'An ill-favored thing, but mine own,'" said Alison.

"There's a good deal in that," said Jessie, more seriously. "I like things to be mine own; and as for people, to be mine own is a good quality that covers all deficiencies." She paused a moment and then went on as if offering some sort of apology. "But I couldn't help being pleased to see uncle John, this morning, you know, and I think he was pleased that I was pleased, wasn't he? Still I don't want to be taken away from Birrendale just yet."

"I wish Mac Carruthers had kept away altogether! What can you see in him? A more thoroughly uninteresting young man I never met. I should tire of him in two minutes."

"So should I of your wretched 'Border Towers,' 'A poor thing but mine own!'" said Jessie, turning away her head a little.

"Don't you be too sure!"

"Well, I suppose he is a trifle flirtful, but then—so am I. It doesn't mean anything;

one must have some one to talk to; life's so dreary when there's no one about."

"I don't find it so," said Alison, vigorously shaking up the bed they had begun to make. Nor was it at that moment, for her thoughts were crowding fast and thick just then, so stirred had they been by those strips of printed paper.

"Then as you're so happy and contented," said Jessie, "when we've finished the rooms you'd better make the pudding and I'll go and look if there's anything for soupage left in the garden."

"McQuade brought in every bit he could find yesterday."

"I'd rather trust my own eyes," said Jessie.

So saying, she put on her hat and jacket, and went out. Not, however, into the steep kitchen garden, behind the house, but down the moss-grown brae-side path that led to the Birren. There, sheltered by the thick ever-green woods, through which ran a never silent bourn, the polypodies had flourished bright and green all the long winter; and there a few early primroses were blooming.

Jessie gathered a handful of leaves and blossoms, and stole cautiously down to the little stone bridge under which the bourn was singing

its last song, before it fell into the river, and lost its own identity.

On this little bridge Jessie stood awhile and she looked this way and she looked that—first to her right along the path by the river-side, then to the left among the spaces between the ashy grey stems of the great beeches that grew on one bank of the stream, then she turned to the narrow winding path she had just descended, then to the tall firs and heavy spruces that grew on the opposite bank. Not a human being could she see anywhere, nor hear any sound, except the last song of the bourn, and the rushing of the brown, white crested river.

"It's far too early for Mac Carruthers and there'll be never a fish caught to-day!" she said to herself and again she looked this way, and that, but saw no one.

"It's far too early," she said to herself again, "and I wish Mac Carruthers had stayed away altogether. Who's that yonder by the silver firs?" And she looked eagerly along the river path, and half turned to run away up the brae-side.

"It's just the water bailiff; if so, I'll go home again," and she began to retrace her steps, stopping now and then to gather some leaf, deeply stained with orange or scarlet.

A footfall presently startled her, she turned with heightened colour, half expecting to meet Mac Carruthers; but instead of seeing the young man, she only beheld the boy Baird, the minister's son, a lad of about eighteen, whose studies were, unfortunately, too often disturbed by visions of Miss Jessie Bayliss. He had been following close behind the water bailiff, and had seen Jessie on the bridge and had hurried to meet her.

"How are ye?" he asked, as he came up to Jessie, in a curious sing-song intonation.

"I'm just nipped up with the cold," said Jessie, pulling hard at a long trail of minute ivy as she spoke, and never vouchsafing him so much as one glance of her eyes.

Without a word, "the boy Baird," as the girls always called him, plunged his hand into his pocket, drew out his knife, and cut the ivy.

"Thanks," said Jessie, rising from her stooping position, and turning to him with a smile that nearly slew him on the spot.

"Maggie says you're going South," he stammered, for he had been all but deprived of speech by the radiant glance of thanks.

"How did Maggie come to hear of it?" asked Jessie.

"She heard it yesterday, when she and

mother called at Mrs. Carruthers's. 'Twill be just dreary without you!" said the lad.

"It's dreary enough, even with me, I'm thinking," said Jessie. "And I can't stay out in the wind any longer, so just climb up and get me some of those polypodies, and then gather me a handful or two of primroses, there's a good fellow, for uncle John is here to-day, and we must have something pretty for the table."

"All right," exclaimed Baird, who much prompter in action than in speech, at once began to get out of his ulster, that he might climb the better.

So Jessie went in with such spoils as she had already collected, leaving Baird, who ought to have been on his way to the tutor's, with whom he was cramming, scrambling up a tree that had a very green and mossy trunk and dragging down the polypodies with an energy that leads one to suspect that his father's interferences with Mrs. Bayliss's affairs was not absolutely disinterested.

The fact was that young Baird's description of the privations the girls had endured, together with the time the lad wasted, had determined the clergyman to write that letter. Mr. Baird had not, however, thought fit to confide this to his son.

Jessie entered the house by the back door. In the kitchen she found Alison stoning raisins for a pudding.

"Well, where are the vegetables?" Alison asked, as Jessie came in with nothing more substantial than ivy and primroses in her hands.

"I don't know," said Jessie. "But anyhow we'll have fine decorations, for the boy Baird is hard at work out on the brae. He'll be round here directly."

And so he was. With his folded ulster full of leaves and primroses. He stood proudly on the red door-step and rang the bell with a vehemence peculiar to himself.

"There's your slave," said Alison, and off went Jessie to reduce him to a still more abject condition by her gratitude.

"Oh, thanks, thanks! you've done nobly!" she said, and she took the folded ulster and its treasures into her arm, thereby making herself into a picture so admirable that the poor boy was ready to fall down and kiss the ground at her feet, when behold who should they see trotting round the corner and along the broad drive beside the great banks of rhododendron but Mr. Malcolm Carruthers, himself on his cousin Alec's horse.

Now Jessie was perfectly aware that stand-

ing there in the door-way, her arms full of green fronds and pale primroses, with her boyish adorer gazing at her, she made a charming something to look at among the surrounding bleak bareness, so that in spite of the cutting wind she stayed there to welcome Mac Carruthers.

The picture wanted no interpreter for Mac —Jessie was charming—the boy too young to make Mac jealous.

Mac rode quickly up to the door.

"Good morning, Miss Bayliss!" he said, "I've brought you a little offering!"

The boy suddenly turned round and looked as if he would have slain him. Mac noticed the ferocity of his expression, it amused him intensely.

"All my friends are remembering me to-day!" said Jessie, brightly. Which little speech made the poor boy think her more of a goddess than ever, it was so kind of her to put him among her friends.

"Who could forget you?" asked Carruthers gallantly.

"Some people find it easy enough," said Jessie.

"Look here, just let me put these down, Geordie Baird will be needing his coat;" and she turned swiftly away and ran into the

kitchen, where she deposited the boy's present on the table.

"Oughtn't you to be at your tutor's, young man?" asked Mac, as soon as Jessie had disappeared, looking down at the boy.

"What's that to you?" returned the lad, with an angry flush.

"I don't like to see your father imposed upon, that's all," said Mac.

A remark which completely shut the boy up.

"Here, Geordie, and thank you very much," said Jessie, handing him his coat.

"Thank you, and good morning," said young Baird, and he went off abruptly and hurried over the lawn and the brae-side.

"That's a cub that wants a little licking!" remarked Mac.

"He's just a boy!" said Jessie, compassionately.

"Yes, I often wonder how one ever gets the degradation of having once been just a a boy one's self! Now, here's my offering, take this basket and look in it. I've robbed the conservatory to an extent that will bring down vials of wrath upon my head."

"How lovely!" exclaimed Jessie, opening the basket and peeping into it; "I haven't seen such things for years, for centuries!"

"You've Mr. Harbuckle with you?" asked Mac.

"Yes, how did you know?"

"Oh, McQuade told our Allan Bell; and so my aunt sent this to Mrs. Bayliss with her kind regards and that sort of thing. We had a fine fish sent us yesterday from the Tay and as we knew that there's nothing but a haddie to be found in all Kirkhope town to-day, we thought it would come in handy. They told Bell to come over with it; but I upset that little arrangement, and brought it myself."

"Well, it's just awfully kind of Mrs. Carruthers to think of us," said Jessie. "Please tell her so."

"Then I'm to have no thanks, I suppose," said Mac, as if aggrieved.

"Why should you be thanked for pleasing yourself?" asked Jessie, with a very pronounced smile.

"I'll go away then, and never come back any more." And Mac, who had been bending down from his horse, straightened himself as if about to ride away that instant.

"I wish you had never come back at all!" said Jessie, turning her face away a little and showing the drawing of her throat and chin to very great advantage.

"Oh! *Can* you call yourself a truthful girl?" asked Mac, as if terribly shocked.

"I can't stand in this wind any longer," said Jessie. "Thank Mrs. Carruthers. Good bye."

"Won't you ask me in?"

"No, indeed! Besides, I can't. Thank Mrs. Carruthers—good-bye," and she retreated, a few steps with the basket in her hand.

"Good-bye—but look here. I may come for the basket on Monday, mayn't I?" pleaded Mac.

"Good-bye," said Jessie, with decision. "I've nothing more to say to you. Thank Mrs. Carruthers very much! Good-bye!"

"Oh, thank *me* a little, just a little!"

But the inexorable Jessie only shook her head.

"I wish you'd go away!" she said.

"All right then! But remember:

> "'How merrily lives a fair young knight,
> Who—et cetera, et cetera;'"

and taking her at her word, he turned his horse towards the path by the rhododendrons and rode off; but not without turning once or twice; and the last time he turned he fancied he saw the top of Jessie's head just outside the door.

As soon as he was out of sight, Jessie was

sorry she had not kept him chattering there a little longer.

"Why did I send him away? What possessed me?" she asked herself.

Who can tell? Such are the ways of girls.

"Jessie! Jessie! For heaven's sake, child, shut that door!" she heard her aunt calling; but John Harbuckle, who was at that moment leaving the dining-room, caught Miss Jessie taking a furtive last look round the corner.

"Who is the young man?" he asked his sister the next time they were alone.

"Oh! they're only playing!" said Mrs. Bayliss. "Jessie will play!"

"A dear girl! But very different from her mother!" thought John Harbuckle. "My Jessie seldom played."

While Jessie had been alternately tormenting and delighting her lovers, and Alison had been busy about household matters, poor uncle John had been having a very bad little quarter of an hour with his sister Mary.

At first Mrs. Bayliss had been dignified, then tearful, then reproachful, then indignant, now she cut him to the heart by asking him how he could tear her away from her husband's grave in the cemetery on the other side of the river: then she tapped his nerves by the

contempt with which she spoke of the City, his City, his dear London City, the object of his tenderest, most ideal affection, and by the ruthless way in which she tried to set their long, past childhood, around which he had fondly thrown a softening haze, in the hardest, crudest, most realistic light.

"Well well, Mary," said John at last, "if you find that you really can't be happy in——"

"I can be happy nowhere!" she exclaimed.

"If you find you really can't be comfortable in London"—with an emphasis on the changed adjective—

"I don't call Tower Hill London—you must know it's quite out of the London world."

"Why, then, you can take a little place near Woolwich, where you can have as many military friends as you like. I am sorry that civilians are so——"

"They're detestable to me; they have no manners! It's been a grief to me all my life through that I am so unfortunately connected with City people. I hoped when I married my poor James that I had done with the City altogether; but alas! there was the same dreadful commercial element in his character, too, poor fellow; he would think he understood business: that was the terrible mistake he made. Poor Arthur's failure and

death were thrown away upon him. Although I'm sure I don't know what could have made him so eager for business; I'm sure I can conscientiously say I always tried my hardest to set him against it."

"There I quite believe you," said John, dryly. "How is it, then, that you are still so anxious to keep on this losing concern?"

"John, how can you dare—how can you," she sobbed, "how can you-d-dare to ask me such a question? Don't you suppose that if I'd have been with him on a sinking ship I'd have g-g-gone down with him? But you can't understand; you can't enter into the feelings of married people, you're a bachelor!"

"And necessarily a brute," put in John.

"I didn't mean that," said Mary, through her tears; "I only meant that unmarried people can't understand married ones. And I was never easy to understand—there was but one man who ever did understand me, and now he's gone!"

Mary began wandering aimlessly up and down the dining-room, pausing now and then to gaze at the precious books of the late Captain which were to be found all over the house in a way both irritating and affecting to her brother, who sat bending towards the fire with something like tears in his eyes, feeling

very much tempted to offer his all to throw after what had been already lost.

"I think, Mary, I'll try and get a nap." he said at length, when he felt that the prowling of his sister was almost more than he could bear.

"Very well," assented Mary, as if nothing on earth were of the slightest consequence to her, and as her brother slowly rose and crossed the room she never so much as turned towards him.

"Poor Mary!" sighed John Harbuckle to himself as he gently closed the door behind him.

It was at that very moment that he caught sight of Jessie peering round the corner. He passed on along the corridor to his own room without speaking to her. He had heard talking and laughing and the ringing of a horse's hoofs. He understood what it all meant pretty well.

"She, too, doesn't want to go, I suppose," he said; "but this time I must be firm. It won't do; they mustn't be allowed to ruin themselves. If I can help it they shall not."

So he carried out his programme in spite of all opposition. Before he left for London on Tuesday evening he had arranged for the sale of the farm, the letting of the house, the

satisfying of the man at Glasgow, and the carrying on of the house-keeping until Cauldknowe could be left.

The feeble little sunbeam that had so tenderly encircled Alison as she returned thanks for her first success was the harbinger of many others that struggled through the dark grey clouds until they gained strength and numbers sufficient to chase the long winter away altogether.

The sun shone on Birrendale; the sky grew bright, the tops of the dark evergreens became brilliant with new growth; the stream was in good order for fishing and Mac Carruthers, who had haunted its banks when the foaming river was the colour of terra-cotta, now appeared to dwell there in perpetuity, and Mac was an uncommonly successful fisherman. When others had been all day at work and had taken nothing, Mac would come down for a quarter of an hour, and charm a dozen or so of trout or herling into his basket, and when never a salmon had been seen in the stream for weeks Mac would be sure to land the first that managed to escape the nets at the river's mouth, and to leap the "calls," by the mill dams.

There was generally now a dish of toothsome herlings—a delicious little pinked-flesh fish peculiar, so they say, to the border streams, up-

on Mrs. Bayliss's breakfast table whenever the water was at all in order.

"How do you get them?—other people don't!" asked Jessie, one day.

"Oh," said Mac, gaily, "we've made a little arrangement, it's 'Whistle and I'll come to ye, my lad'—and I whistle and they just come. They like me to catch them, that's the fact of it."

"Silly little herlings!" said Jessie.

"Not at all," said Mac, "they know I catch them a great deal better than other people do. Besides, think of the honour of being eaten by you! Happy little herlings, I should say!"

In those days Mac and Jessie saw a good deal of each other; not that Mac used to stay fishing at the braefoot by the hour together, but that he used to come pretty nearly every day.

Was it all play between them?

Mac Carruthers would just then have found life rather sad if it had not been for that little bit of fishing, in spite of his own great stores of strong vitality.

His cousin, Alec Carruthers, was in delicate health, consumption had been feared at one time. He was a few years younger than Mac, whom he regarded as one of the most splendid beings this world has ever seen, and without exception the grandest nurse.

"Make haste back; I weary so when you're away!" were generally his last words when Mac bade him good-bye.

It was depressing in the house. No sooner was Mac on horse-back, or in the dog-cart, on his way to Jessie, than he felt a violent reaction; playing with Jessie, if it were play, was simply the most delicious experience that Mac Carruthers had ever yet known. It was quite as delightful to Jessie. She always knew when Mac was at the foot of that brae. A sort of instinct I suppose it was that told her; for Mac came at all manner of odd times; just when he could best get free to leave Muirhead.

"I shall cry when you take me away from here, I know I shall!" Jessie used to say very often to Alison, but never to Mac; oh no, never to Mac! At least not in those days, just after John Harbuckle had gone home.

"For," said she to herself, "men are naturally always too conceited, without being flattered like that! and besides—besides—I really couldn't tell him! How could I?"

"Well yes, I don't know how it is, but I really am an uncommonly lucky beggar in other things beside catching salmon and herling," Mac said to Jessie one day.

She had come down the brae just as the sun

was setting, and the red beams had fallen on her bright hair and made it so luminous that Mac turning round at the sound of her footsteps, had been struck almost blind by it; so he declared, with how much truth it is not for me to say.

"I can't see to fish any longer," he had said, and so they both strolled about the banks and talked. Then it was that Jessie had asked him how he managed to succeed when others failed; then it was he had gone on about being "a lucky beggar."

"Lucky!" said Jessie; "I always understood you were a signal failure! Every one except your cousin Alec says so!"

"Ah! but that's just the luck of it!" he answered. "I'm always making what other people call 'failures' (relatives you know, always think you ought to be able to make bricks without either straw or clay, their opinions don't count); but the odd part of it is, my failures are always better to me than other people's successes are to them. I'm like the Chinese tumbling toys, throw me down which way you like I always right myself. For instance, you may say, my not passing for the Civil Service was a failure. Granted; but then if I had passed I might never have come down here and seen you."

"That might have been just as well for both of us," said Jessie.

"For you perhaps, but certainly not for me," said Mac, fervently. "Indeed," he went on, "when I think how nearly I was not going to a certain ever-memorable ball, I feel quite frightened. But there was my luck again, you see! Well, then, if I hadn't failed, my cousin Alec would not have had the benefit of my devoted care all the winter, and might have been in a consumption by this time; you see what a fine thing both to myself and others my 'failure,' as my multitudinous relatives persist in calling it, has already turned out! I say *already*," and he suddenly looked up at Jessie, with that merry, merry twinkle of his own in his eyes; but somehow, that twinkle softened a moment after, in a way that made Jessie's colour rise.

"I say *already*, because—" and he slightly hesitated—"who knows what happiness—what—what—that is, as it was the excuse of my meeting you, I can never be thankful enough for it, I mean."

"You might have said the same, and I dare say you did say the same, to the lovely Viennese girls, to a dozen of them at Nice. You wouldn't have gone to Nice if you hadn't failed, you know;" said

Jessie. "That was another good thing, wasn't it?"

"I admit Nice was very jolly, and that they were perfection. But then I don't care for perfection. I don't consider you perfect, far from it. You won't say that you're sorry you're going to London?" the last sentence rather wistfully.

"Why should I?" asked Jessie; but not looking up, although he was looking down.

"You are sorry a wee bit? Just a wee bit?" said he, lowering his voice. "Come, make haste and tell me! There are Mrs. Bayliss and your cousin half way down the brae. Not just a wee bit?"

"Oh, nonsense! Nonsense! Nonsense!" cried Jessie, rousing herself. "Good-bye! Good-bye! That is, you'd better come and say 'how d'you do?' to aunt;"

And these two ingenuous young people, walked towards the others as if they had only that very instant met by the merest chance.

"No doubt," observed Alison to Jessie later; "no doubt it was only the sunset that had given you both such a glowing colour. But you looked very nice; I liked to see you—both of you!"

CHAPTER XII.

ARNOLD BIRKETT'S "ATTACK."

IT was again Monday evening; just one week after Arnold Birkett had landed at St. Katherine's Docks.

Arnold Birkett was at the Tavistock hotel, in his room, which was heated up to the utmost of the stove's power.

He had been in that room for several days, with a bad attack of ague and fever.

Ague and fever had been following each other with dismal monotonous alternation, tossing their wretched victim to and fro from the Arctic pole to the burning desert. They were accompanied moreover, by a complication of other ailments, each one of which would have reduced even a cheerful man in cheerful circumstances to abject melancholy. As for Arnold Birkett, alone or with no other companion than an uneasy conscience and a bitter past, the only wonder to himself was how he managed to live through it at all.

Through it all, through the icy cold, the

burning fiery furnace, the blackness of darkness he called "liver," one deed, one evil deed, for ever haunted him.

It never left him; it seemed not a memory merely, but a thing with eyes. It never moved, never varied. Morning, noon, and night, there it was, the same, always the same, always staring at him

But his own attitude towards it changed often.

"God left me. The Devil tempted me. Fate was against me. I sinned. How could I help it?"

He had seen no one except the hotel people since he had been ill. They came, waited on him, and went away.

By Monday evening, when he was able to be up, he felt that if he could not talk to some human being he must go mad and kill himself. He had known men who had done so; men who had been for months up an African river without seeing a white face, until solitude had been too much for them and they had blown their brains out. He heard the noises of the world without, the clatter of street traffic, the ringing of church bells, the many signs and sounds of multitudinous life all round. "It's awfully maddening," he said, "this solitude in the midst of this great thronged City!—it's

more dreadful than the deadly stillness and utter loneliness of my African river. If I could only walk about the streets and see people it would be something!"

But just then, to move, to walk seemed almost as impossible as to fly to this man leaning back in his arm-chair with his feet outstretched on another.

"If I could see John Harbuckle!" he said, presently. "Yes, that's what I must do! I must write to John Harbuckle, I'll send down a messenger, and ask John Harbuckle to come up at once. They could be back in an hour. In the whole of this big City he's the only man I can trust. I can trust him. He's a Christian if there isn't another in the world! I must see John Harbuckle."

Then he let the pen which he had taken up fall from between his fingers that suddenly had grown nerveless.

"I can't put it on paper!" he said, sinking back again into the chair and covering his face with one hand. "I can't do it! yet I must see John Harbuckle. I shall go mad if I don't!"

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in," said Arnold Birkett, wearily.

"A gentleman downstairs would be glad to know how you are, sir."

Birkett looked at the card the man gave him.

"Ask him to be good enough to come up."

And a few minutes later in came Mr. Tildesley, whom Arnold Birkett seemed as delighted to see, as if they had been the oldest and most intimate friends for years.

Birkett, was on his feet with amazing celerity.

"Well, this is a providence!" he exclaimed, a smile trying hard to break over his yellow face. "I haven't seen a creature since the attack came on! How are you? What shall I order? Here, this is a comfortable chair. Do you smoke cigars? All right, then; there's a brand you don't often come across!" and with true colonial hospitality he made Mr. Tildesley exceedingly welcome; but no attention could adequately express his pleasure at the sight of some one to talk to.

"This is a bad affair," said Tildesley, sympathetically. "I rather wondered why you didn't give me a call. I had to meet a man from Melbourne here to-night, and they told me you had been laid up. Usual dose I suppose? You tropical birds always get it when you come home, don't you?"

"Precious stiff dose, this time! said Birkett. And having an immense amount of talk to get

rid of, he began a very minute description of his late sufferings.

"Ah, you want taking in hand!" said Mr. Tildesley, reflectively.

"Yes, by the undertaker," returned Birkett.

"Tush! That's what you all say. You all want to order your coffins as soon as you get home, I've had some experience, I can tell you, I know so many colonists. Get to work! Get to work! That's better than all your nostrums, and your doctors, and your undertakers."

"So I used to say on the Coast. I *did* work there and no mistake.

Then they drifted into talk about African produce, Mincing Lane, the City in general, and grew to a certain extent confidential.

Arnold Birkett, once started on the resources of Africa, could go on and on for ever; so could Mr. Tildesley on Colonial brokering. Oh, dear and lovely "shop," how sweet it is to all of us!

It is to be hoped that Mr. Tildesley had an indulgent wife at home, because it was late before the two men parted.

Arnold Birkett did not write to John Harbuckle that night.

After Mr. Tildesley had left, Arnold Birkett did not feel that craving for the sight of John

Harbuckle that had seized him earlier in the evening. He did not write to him.

Thoroughly aroused and, for the time being, apparently cured by companionship, an immense hopefulness took possession of him.

"It may yet be possible," he exclaimed. "Why not strive for the possible? I will! Let me see if I have a chance; before I see her or him. I'll put John Harbuckle off for a while. "If we meet, well and good. If not, having waited so long, I can wait a little longer until I see how things will go. It is possible! and what is possible must be done."

Mr. Tildesley found Arnold Birkett decidedly interesting, he hardly knew why; perhaps on several accounts, perhaps the most decided being that he saw business advantages in the connection to both himself and his new friend.

When Arnold Birkett was better he was frequently in Mr. Tildesley's office; and after the lapse of some time, Mr. Tildesley asked him to come down to "Crow's Nest" on the following Sunday; an invitation which was accepted without hesitation, for Mr. Birkett felt dull alone at the Tavistock even when in comparative health, and if he had friends in London it was certain he never called upon any of them

Charing Cross Station was looking very desolate on the Sunday morning when Arnold Birkett took his ticket for Lambrooke.

He was the solitary occupant of the first-class smoking carriage by which he travelled down. Most of the persons he saw on the different platforms he passed carried Bibles, Prayerbooks, or church music in their hands, for it was too early in the season for the Sunday excursionist, and that part of the line is always eminently respectable.

Half an hour brought him to the flourishing suburb of Lambrooke, where he found no less than six cabs, including one hansom, in waiting; so populous is Lambrooke.

Hailing the hansom he was rapidly driven along a fine broad road, bordered by detached villa residences, every one of which bore a name of its own. The houses were as different as their names: "Plinlimmon" had a classic portico in stucco and straight uncompromising lines; "Dorden" next door, was a glorified old English farm-house with carved barge-boards and white and brown horizontal timbers; "The Chesnuts" was a glowing red-brick Elizabethan residence; "Inglenook," a mass of trellis work, soon to be covered with climbing roses; "Mossy Bank," a hideous square block of pale bricks, that had an un-

comfortable slack-baked look about them,—and so on *ad infinitum.* It was indeed a work for a stranger to find among those divers houses the one he was seeking.

The taste for gardening, however, seemed proper to all the residents of these various abodes. Every garden was in perfect order, and showed, more or less, a wealth of primroses, daffodils and hyacinths, with here and there an almond tree in full bloom.

Mr. Tildesley's house, "Crow's Nest," was a good way down the road. It was a not unpicturesque red brick house, which had been quite large enough when there had been a good many at home.

Nothing about the place showed any striking individuality on the owner's part. The prim orderliness of the front garden was fully sustained by the arrangements within. There were very few things in the house that one did not know very well, from the door mat to the drawing-room paper, all was familiar to any Londoner; but it struck Mr. Birkett, who had not been inside a private house in the suburbs of London for many years, as an immense advance upon what he had remembered to have seen in dwellings of the same class when last he was among them; and he remarked to himself that

there had been a good deal of levelling up since his time.

Mr. and Mrs. Tildesley at home were very like their surroundings; they differed little from their neighbours, but their neighbours and themselves had also been submitted to a large extent to the levelling up process.

Mrs. Tildesley was a woman no longer young, but still not distinctly old. There was something just a little hard about her features; but she had kindly, pleasant, and truly hospitable ways.

"The spring would be coming on beautifully if it were not for these cold winds," Mr. Tildesley remarked, as soon as they were seated at table.

"Yes," said Birkett, "and if I didn't feel it so keenly I should think the spring a delightful change. In the tropics one wearies of the continual luxuriance of the vegetation; one never sees the trees without leaves.

"Then England must look very bare to you just now," said Mrs. Tildesley.

"Bare but interesting. I could but notice as I came along how interesting everything seemed," said Birkett, with a trifle of sadness not without its effect upon his host and hostess.

Mrs. Tildesley thought that he, although he was no longer a young man, was, like the trees,

interesting, and had still fine eyes, bordered by those very appealing charms, long, if now rather broken, eye-lashes.

She was not by several the only woman who had admired those dark eyes and lashes; they had in their time, done a considerable amount of damage.

"Then is there no spring in Africa?" Mrs. Tildesley asked, with a little extra kindness.

"No. We've only the rains and dries"—and he began to talk at large with ease about natives and palm oil, palm nuts, gold dust, ivory, ginger—and so on; but not a word did Mr. Birkett vouchsafe as to his family or to his domestic concerns.

"I wonder if you're married?" thought Mrs. Tildesley.

"Are you married?" she asked a length, after she had perplexed herself on the subject for some time.

"A widower, unhappily," said Birkett with a sigh.

"You may well say unhappily," put in Mr. Tildesley; "I don't know a more wretched condition for a man to be in, and I can speak from experience. You found me in a frightful state, didn't you my dear?" turning to his wife; "I'm sure I couldn't answer for what might

have happened if Mrs. Tildesley hadn't taken pity on me. Any children?"

"One," said Birkett, "we had one little girl, that's all."

"And she, your daughter, did not go out to Africa with you?" asked Mrs. Tildesley, tentatively, with evident interest.

"Oh no! I couldn't have run so great a risk. That is one of the penalties of living in such a climate, you must be separated from your children; your domestic life is ruined."

"Miss Birkett is not in London?" asked Mrs. Tildesley.

"Oh dear no; she's staying with relatives in the North!" said Birkett, with so much decision that no one could possibly have told from his manner that he had but the vaguest notion where his daughter was, or indeed whether she were yet in this world at all, but had made a perfectly random shot. Perfectly? Well, that is putting the case too strongly; he may have had something to go upon; or perhaps he wanted to be able to answer the question that he may have thought would be, as it was, the next.

"Are you from the North?"

"Well, to tell you the truth I can hardly say what place has the honour of owning me," he answered, "I was born in London; but I've

lived a good deal in the provinces. My father was a Cheshire man. To myself I seem to belong now more to the West Coast of Africa than to any other part of the globe. About twenty years ago I was living in London, since then my visits have been few and far between. I find London wonderfully changed. A great deal cleaner, taller, and altogether finer than it used to me."

"Ah, there was a great deal of business done behind the cobwebby old windows, though!" put in Mr. Tildesley, regretfully.

"You find us improved, I hope?" said Mrs. Tildesley.

"On the whole, yes," said Mr. Birkett, as if he were by no means sure; "I suppose I must say yes."

"Why do you hesitate?" asked Mrs. Tildesley, looking towards her guest with increasing interest.

"To be perfectly candid," said he, smiling, "and not to put too fine a point upon it, public opinion seems to have developed what I can only characterise as a topsyturviness—if you will pardon the expression—that is really most perplexing to me. Everything that used to be wrong is now right; much that used to be objectionable is now the correct thing. I really don't know my way

about at all. I am continually being taken by surprise——"

"And shocked?" asked Mrs. Tildesley.

"Especially by the young ladies?" added Mrs. Tildesley's husband.

"I've gone into society very little since I've returned to London, my health having suffered so greatly from the change of climate; but I must admit that the modern girl astonishes me very much; indeed, she is quite incomprehensible to me, and is as far from my ideal English girl as Lambrooke is from Cape Coast Castle. She seems to delight in most things my mother and my wife would have condemned. I can only say I don't understand her."

"Nor I," asserted Mrs. Tildesley. "So you see, Mr. Birkett, there may be still a few people left to agree with you. I assure you, you will find our old rector and our doctor, indeed most of our circle down here, still walking in the good old ways. Your daughter, I hope, has not imbibed modern notions? It must make one so anxious when one is away, you cannot be sure what dreadful ideas are being instilled into the poor children's minds in your absence."

"She is in safe hands," said Arnold Birkett, promptly; but not without a strange feeling of solemnity.

After Mrs. Tildesley had gone, the two men sat talking for some time, and then went into the drawing-room, where they had coffee.

Mrs. Tildesley could not have been quite a common-place person, for her coffee tasted like coffee, an achievement by no means to be met with every day.

"I really must compliment you on your coffee; it is the best I have tasted since I left Paris early in the spring," said Arnold Birkett.

Mrs. Tildesley smiled. Whether intentionally or not, Mr. Birkett had soothed a little weakness of hers. She liked the details of her house-keeping to be appreciated. She took an interest in those who noticed such things.

"I always look upon the making of fine coffee as a rare accomplishment; my poor wife possessed it," he said, as if encouraged to confidence by the friendly smile.

"Has she been dead long?" asked Mrs. Tildesley, with sympathy.

"Nearly eight years."

"Eight years! Not many widowers are as constant as that; that is to say, they generally marry again very soon."

"The very best thing they can do," said Mr. Birkett, hurriedly, his host having recently confided to him that he had married again

within the year, "that is, generally speaking; but, of course, there are exceptions to that rule as well as to all others."

"And you are an exception, at least for the present. But your daughter, perhaps, will be able to make a home for you? What is her age?"

"Why—really how time flies!—she must be nearly twenty now. Mr. Tildesley, I see you want your siesta; don't mind me."

"Not at all! Not at all!" exclaimed Mr. Tildesley, opening his eyes with a start. "A cigar in the summer-house is all I want. You smoke I know."

So the two men went out together and talked for the rest of the afternoon, greatly to the satisfaction of both of them.

In the evening, Mr. Tildesley went to the station with his guest, making an appointment with him for the next morning before they parted.

"My dear," said Mrs. Tildesley to her husband on his return, as he drew his arm-chair up to the fire, "I like Mr. Birkett very much; but——" significantly, "but——" still more significantly.

"But what, my dear?" asked Mr. Tildesley, looking across to his wife with some alarm.

"He is a man with a secret!" said the wife, oracularly.

"A secret! you don't mean it?" and Mr. Tildesley, who had a profound belief in his wife's knowledge of character, adjusted his spectacles the better to observe her expression.

"I do mean it," she said with decision.

"Bless my soul! A secret! Why he's told me all about himself! What he's been doing, what he means to do, who are his bankers, in fact he's laid all his plans before me and asked my advice; he's told me all!"

"Not quite all, my dear," said Mrs. Tildesley looking down on the book in her hand, as if it were the "Book of Fate" and she were reading out that sentence from it.

"Well of course no man tells you *all*," said Mr. Tildesley, uneasily.

"In this case there is a very important item omitted."

"How on earth can you tell? You wouldn't say he was a returned convict, would you?"

"Certainly not. He looks you in the face, and, by the way, has very handsome eyes and long lashes."

"Of course not. There's no mistake about his having been out in Africa. H.— and R.— have done business with him for years. He

happened to mention their names so I went round to them, and asked all about him. Do you mean I am not to trust him?"

"I didn't say that," returned the wife, "I said *he has a secret.*"

"Oh well, I don't care if he has a hundred as long as I can safely do business with him. May I?"

"I should say so. The secret—for I'm sure there is one—is *a domestic secret.*"

"But he talked about his wife and daughter!"

"Yes—so he did; he talked about them just enough to tell me that the secret is in some way or another connected with them."

"Well—well, I suppose everybody who isn't a babbling fool has a secret somewhere. Birkett is by no means a fool; on the contrary I should give him credit for being a shrewd fellow."

"Only tolerably shrewd, but decidedly interesting."

"So I feel, although why he should be I can't quite make out," said Mr. Tildesley, with a slightly puzzled look.

"*It's the mystery*, my dear," said his wife, emphatically; and leaning back in her chair she turned over a page of a volume of "Good Words" as if she were engrossed in her book;

while her husband looked at her, as husbands should, with wonder almost approaching veneration; so struck was he with this new proof of her sagacity and penetration.

CHAPTER XIII.

THROUGH BIRRENDALE.

NOW to sell off the farm and to find a tenant for the house took some time, so that May was nearly over before Mrs. Bayliss and the girls were ready to go to London.

Their last few weeks in Birrendale were very pleasant to the girls.

The house was put into order, the pretty drawing-room, that the Captain and his wife had furnished with much care and a good deal of taste, was in daily use, and afternoon tea re-established on behalf of the visitors whose carriage wheels again cut up the grey shingle of the drive.

Mrs. Bayliss and the girls went out to pay a round of parting calls; Mrs. Bayliss in new weeds of, if possible, a deeper depth of woe than even her last, the girls in new grey dresses and black velvet hats, hats that were exactly alike, only while in hers Jessie looked more lovely than ever, by no dint of wrestling could Alison's be subdued into

sitting properly on her head, although she almost wept over its obduracy.

On these occasions McQuade was sent down to the town for a horse and carriage, and Alison suffered many things during the drive from the insubordination of her own hat and from the aggravating way in which Jessie's kept its place, as well as from her mother's incessant quarrels with her horse; for Mrs. Bayliss always insisted on driving.

Now it so happened that one morning, one very lovely morning, when the wooded ground above the Birren was a mass of primroses and when twenty kinds of spring flowers had been counted by Mac Carruthers on the banks along the river, it so happened that the Reverend Andrew Baird was going to a meeting of Presbytery at Allarbie, a town several miles inland and, knowing that Mrs. Bayliss had friends there, he very kindly suggested that she should let him drive her over to say Good-bye, as it was further than she would care to take the hack from Kirkhope.

Mrs. Bayliss as a rule detested Scotch ministers; she was a woman who detested a good many persons and things; but she made an exception now and then, and, as she held Mr. Baird to be almost as good as an English clergyman, she accepted the offer.

Before she left home she gave the girls a long list of commissions to execute in Kirkhope, which was their nearest town.

Alison had a great deal of very strong filial affection; but I fear she was not sorry to see her mother depart. As for Jessie, she flung her arms round her cousin's waist and tried to make her dance through the hall, as they came away from the front door, after having carefully packed Mrs. Bayliss into the clergyman's chaise; but Alison was not a girl one could easily make dance unless the spirit of the thing possessed her, which it did not just then.

In two days more they were to leave Cauldknowe.

"Now here's the whole heavenly day before us!" cried Jessie, "and I'm just wild to get out. I feel I must have a real holiday! I'm up to anything! Only, Alie, you're not half sympathetic! Why will you be so lumpy? Come along now! I'll put your hat on for you and subdue it! We'll just make ourselves look very nice, and go to the town by the river!"

"Then I'd far better stay at home! What do I know about 'flies,' and Macs and those kinds of creatures?" said Alison. "Oh! I weary so of that Mac! If you must flirt,

you might at least choose an interesting subject!"

"Ah! Interesting people don't run about wild in Birrendale!" said Jessie. "But, poor Mac! You're too hard on him! *I* don't find him so dreadfully dull."

"All young men are dull!" said Alison, sententiously. "Where can you find one who is a really charming companion, like, for instance, uncle John? Please don't pull my head off, it's my only one and I may want it in the City!"

By which exclamation you may perceive that Jessie was already at work upon Alison; she was in fact trying to make the plaits of her cousin's hair keep firmly in their places, but hitherto without success, and many severe tugs showed how desperately she was resolved to conquer.

"Ugh!" she exclaimed, savagely. "Ugh! Why will you do your hair in that flopperty style! Nothing short of driving a pin right through your skull would keep anything firmly on such a head as yours! Ugh! Shoo! Shah! *How* I despise a girl who can't do her hair! A girl who fails in her first duty as a feminine person! Ugh! Shoo! Why you might as well be a mere man!" And then came a series of more tugging and twistings

and groans and finally the entire re-adjustment of Alison's *coiffure*.

"There now! you look quite a distinguished person! you look like the great literary woman you are!" said Jessie, when the hair, which was very long and fine, was at last arranged to her satisfaction, and the hat firmly established thereon. "Why don't you set up as a pretty girl, Alison?"

"What's the good of pretending to be what you are not?" asked Alison, smiling, however, with genuine satisfaction, as she saw in the glass that for once she was looking really very nice.

"There's many a girl would set up for being a beauty with only half your store of good looks!" said Jessie, as she began her own toilet. "That's what makes me so angry with you! you don't know your own style!"

"Neither would you if you had half-a-dozen to choose from. It's all very well for you who've only one; but I'm a complicated being," said Alison, half in mirth, but her mirth had rather a serious under-current.

"And I'm a simple one—not to say a simpleton, I suppose!"

"Well, now," said Jessie after a while, "we're ready! Can't find your gloves? Oh,

well, there's a pair of mine! Come along, I'm just as full of friskiness as can be. Let's be off or something will happen to stop us."

And off they were in another minute.

Out of doors, the spring sun was shining brilliantly. Jessie seemed almost to fly as she and Alison crossed the lawn, which once more was a "smooth-shaven green," and down the brae-side, where myriads of flowers were blooming, and where the burn was tinkling in the pure air more gaily than ever.

The two girls paused an instant on the little grey bridge in the bright light, amid the delicious absence of all human sounds. Alison listened to the singing of the burn and the rapid flowing of the clear river, to-day so transparent, that every stone in its rocky bed was visible; Jessie to look this way and that in search of the well-known form of the haunter of the stream.

And there it was; fortunately on the town side of the bridge, so that they must needs pass it on their way.

Not alone, however, was Mac Carruthers to-day.

The two girls walked leisurely along the narrow path between the river and the banks that were now one tangle of luxuriant foliage and flowers. In a few minutes they came up

to the two young men; Mac in a rough brown tweed suit with a fine array of flies around his hard wide-awake; his companion still wearing an over-coat; and, although the day was warm, a china silk handkerchief.

"I'm glad to see you again, Mr. Carruthers," said both the girls at once to the younger man, who was no other than Mac's cousin, Alec.

"Thanks, I'm ever so much better," said Alec, whose rod happened to be out of the water, and, laying it down he raised a long slender hand to his hat. "This is my first venture so far; but it won't be my last;" he added, brightly, looking full at the girls. He was a very young man, hardly twenty, with a face so delicate that had it not been for the dark down on the upper lip it might almost have passed for a girl's.

"And so you're getting quite strong again?" asked Jessie.

"Yes," said he "the sudden change from the South to Muirhead almost knocked me over; but I'm nearly well again now; thanks to Mac."

"Look here, Alec," said Mac, who had been standing on a ledge of rock close down by the river and who now came up to the others. "It's simply absurd to fish in water that's as

bright as glass! I've had enough of it. What's your feeling?"

"I've had enough too," returned Alec; "it's not a bit of good trying when the water doesn't serve."

"It never does serve," said Jessie, "either it's too muddy or else it's too clear; either it's too deep or it's too shallow. It's never right."

"Still he contrives to bring me home something every day," said Alec, indicating his cousin by shrugging the shoulder next him.

"Well, it's certainly not right to-day, so I don't see why I shouldn't go down to the town with you, if you don't mind. I want to see about several things," said Mac to the girls.

"All right," said Alec, "I'll take the tackle back, and drive home in the trap."

"No, no, don't you bother to take the things to the village, I dare say Miss Bayliss will let us leave them at the house until to-morrow. You will let me, won't you? Then I'll be back in two two's."

And hastily gathering together the tackle, he fled away with it as if running for a race.

"Doesn't Mac run well?" said Alec, looking after his hero with undisguised admiration. "I do think," he went on with a naïve earnest simplicity quite his own, "I *do* think that

take him altogether Mac is one of—no I won't qualify it—is the finest fellow I ever met. He's been awfully good to me. I don't know what I'd have done without him."

"He's very kind," said Alison.

"Yes," said Alec, "he's strong, and kind and tender, like strong men who are great and good always are."

Alec as he spoke was still looking after his cousin, so he did not see Jessie's expression.

"And you enjoyed Nice very much?" asked Alison; silence having fallen upon Jessie.

"Oh yes; it quite set me up. I feel another creature now. It was so good to see Mac enjoying himself. Everything was delightful to him."

"Especially the girls, I hear," said Jessie.

"They're just lovely," said Alec, but only with the same sort of enthusiasm, with which he might have spoken of a tree or flower. "Mac talked to them a great deal, of course, but I don't think he left his heart behind him; and I'm sure I didn't; I wearied for this," he said, turning to the river a little, with a certain pathetic fondness, "I wearied for this—this is perfect—perfect!" he repeated, with a little extra ring of his northern "r." "Here he comes back again."

"There, you can't say I've been long," cried

Mac, rushing up, flushed and panting, "Now, old fellow, come a wee bit of the way with us. Isn't it a jolly morning? It will do you good."

"Oh, well, I think I will," said Alec.

Mac Carruthers was perhaps as ingenious a fellow as ever breathed, but for all that, the reason of his wishing Alec to go with them was not anxiety for his cousin's welfare, but to get rid both of Alec and Alison, that he and Jessie might be undisturbed.

Alison was perfectly aware of this; but as young Carruthers rather interested her and was content, indeed delighted, to talk about Birrendale and Border legends, all the way along, she had a pleasant walk. Alec, she thought, was much more intelligent than Mac, being a devourer of books of all sorts.

As for the two others, they managed to keep so far a-head, that their presence was scarcely felt.

"Did you see that fish jump? Aren't they lively this morning," was Jessie's first remark to Mac, as she left Alison. "If we hadn't come by just when we did, you'd have had him; little does he think what benefactors we've been to him?"

"There's no catching them when they jump like that," said Mac. "There goes a herling! A yard straight out of the water! No, I

shouldn't have tried. It is no good trying to do what can't be done. I'm not the sort of fellow to work without hope," he added, his tone growing more serious. "Give me hope and I hold on like a bull-dog. It is a very sweet morning. I know it is," he went on, looking at the beautiful deep red light on the water running swiftly over its brown rocky bed; "but I feel sad. I can't help it, I feel sad."

"Sad?" echoed Jessie,

"Yes—you're going away."

"And you? You'll be going away too," and Jessie dropped into a quieter tone than usual.

There was a pause before Mac answered:

"I suppose so."

"And where?"

"I haven't a notion," said Mac. "I wish I had. Now Alec's so much better I can't sponge upon my uncle much longer; although I don't suppose he'd turn me out, as I really do believe I've saved Alec's life. He was a good deal worse than they would believe, but I think he's getting all right now." He paused again. "You hate being poor, I know; you've told me so a hundred times," he added.

This assertion sounded like a question. Jessie hesitated an instant and then asked another:

"Don't you?"

Her voice was low but clear, with the clearness that comes of feeling rigorously suppressed.

"I never did until lately; I never cared," he replied, passionately. "I hate it intensely to-day; I never hated anything so much in my life."

Mac was a rather primitive being. Civilization had not penetrated very much deeper than the garments with which he clothed his limbs and his mind. He loved and hated with direct and simple fervour; although he sometimes found it necessary to wear over these emotions a slight covering; the same, he fancied as other people wore.

"I hate it," he went on, with sudden fierceness, and with broken sentences. "I hate it to-day! I generally kill what I hate! But poverty's a thing that takes so much killing—it takes time and I want to know my fate to-day. I may never have another chance." There was a great cloud of trouble in his honest eyes as he spoke.

Jessie tried to say a word or two but could not.

"It wouldn't be right of me to—to—that is, of course it wouldn't be honourable of me to ask you to make promises when I haven't

a farthing beyond the hundred and fifty a-year my parents left me. Of course you must be free, of course you must be! but how can I bear the idea of your going to London—and perhaps meeting all sorts of rich men—and not even being quite sure that *you* (I won't say *we*, for I know I haven't) that *you* haven't been merely playing with me. I can't bear it!"

"It has not been all play: not quite all," said Jessie. To Mac's ears, most lovely words, most sweetly spoken.

"You care for me one wee bit?" he asked, the sunshine of hope and love chasing the shadows from his face, as the sun in heaven was from the bright wavelets of the Birren water.

He turned to Jessie with the question:

"You care for me one wee bit?"

"Just the least in the world," she answered, under her voice, with the loveliest blush and smile.

She certainly had the most exquisite mouth; it always had been difficult to resist.

Mac (the others being at that moment behind a piece of jutting sand-stone crag) stooped and kissed it.

"Only the least in the world, Jessie?"

"Well—" murmured Jessie, but could get no farther.

"Ah! I know! I know! That's all I need to know."

Now after these two young people had come to this understanding, there was still over a mile to stroll before they reached Kirkhope bridge; so that they had a little time to recover themselves enough to try and pretend to the world that nothing had happened, and that they were only simple ordinary mortals, and had not recently joined the superfine order of engaged couples.

At the foot of the bridge they waited for the others to come up to them. And there, would you believe it? they very nearly had a quarrel. For said Mac:

"Then, after all, Jessie, you are not going to marry Mr. John Harbuckle, who I am told is so fond of you?"

"Oh Mac! How horrible! Why he was my mother's lover! He's a hundred and fifty-six, if he's a day!"

So it came to nothing; they did not quarrel that day. Alec left them at the foot of the bridge and went back along the banks.

Alison did not require to be told what had happened; the way Mac looked down at Jessie, and kept close to her as they all went along the little cobble-stoned turning that led from

the Birren to the town, was quite enough for her.

In a minute or two they had passed between two rows of small houses that once had been red, but which were now covered with a green mould, and came out on to the irregular coast line, all bays and gulfs, so to speak, of the High Street of Kirkhope, or "Kirkup" as the vernacular hath it.

It was market day, the streets were crowded with stalls and people. Instead of the noise of the rushing Birren and its many "caulds" or weirs, there was a great and mighty clattering of brass-tipped wooden clogs, and much squeaking of pigs; and an organ jerking out the semiquavers of: "Within a mile of Edinboro' town."

Jessie let Alison pay all the bills and do all the business; she was far too much excited to attend to such things.

So Jessie and Mac were left to amuse themselves; which they did very well, indeed; extracting an immense amount of pleasure from the stalls, from the local views in the stationer's window, from the picture of a giant mangold-wurzel at the seedsman's, from the little pigs struggling under the netting in the rows of carts, from the women in sun bonnets and the girls in grand, fashion-

able hats with—oh such flowers! but more particularly, from a selection of haberdashery set out in heaps on the road, over which a young man was presiding with the air of the typical charming peer at a bazaar; very greatly delighted if you laid out a penny with him, but apparently quite unconcerned as to the amount of business done.

"Gloves! By Jove!" exclaimed Mac. "How much?"

"Pennies a pair!" replied the young salesman, with an enchanting smile, gracefully measuring off four yards of black tape.

"Jessie, gloves a penny a pair! What a revelation! How possible life becomes when one hears of gloves a penny a pair," said Mac, as they turned away.

"If one could only wear them?" sighed Jessie.

"What a delightful world this would be if it weren't so dear," said Mac, ruefully. "How happy we might be if gloves at a penny a pair were wearable. Let's go into Beattie's and eat cookies!"

"I thought we were going to be very economical," said Jessie.

"What on to-day? I'll begin the day after to-morrow! The moment your train has started. You said Mrs. Bayliss had gone

to Allarbie? Now I want to ask you a question; don't you think filial affection is a lovely thing? of course you do—you feel it towards your aunt——"

"Not quite," said Jessie.

"Well, you do what she tells you?"

"Oh yes. When I can't help it."

"Don't you think it would be a beautiful and touching thing if you were to go to Allarbie to fetch her; instead of leaving her to the uncertain care of the Rev. Andrew, who may chance to forget all about her when he gets discussing the iniquities of heritors with his reverend brethren?"

"You're just daft!" cried Jessie. "You've been standing in the sun till you've got a stroke. How am I to get to Allarbie, I should like to know?"

"Very simply," said Mac; "I'll run over to the 'Blue-bell' and get a trap and a horse that'll go, while you give your cousin the benefit of your advice, and hurry up the shopping; and I'll drive you over to fetch Mrs. Bayliss, and won't she be pleased by your filial attention! It's a splendid day. There's no cap on Criffel. We'll go. We *must* go! I *must* take you one good long drive! We *must* have a holiday to-day!"

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" said Jessie, re-

provingly, but with manifest pleasure at the idea. A good long drive with Mac on such a day! It was too tempting! and Jessie was wild enough for a good many things at that moment.

"Don't say a word to Alison till I've got the trap," said Mac, reading permission in Jessie's face.

"It's just madness!" said Jessie; but without hesitating another second, Mac dashed across the cobble stones and disappeared within the court-yard of the inn.

"It's just madness!" Jessie repeated; but Mac was beyond recall. A moment afterwards, Alison came out of the grocer's, and went to the "fleshers," and then to the "cloggers," Jessie following her and standing by her, looking very much excited.

"What's become of him?" asked Alison, under her voice, as she put down the money for the bill she was paying.

"He's gone quite mad," whispered Jessie. "He's going to drive us over to Allarbie to fetch aunt home. He's getting a trap at the 'Blue-bell.'"

"Jessie!" exclaimed Alison, with indignant astonishment, "I'll not go with you!"

"You'll have to, or I'll just go without you!" said Jessie.

"Jessie, this is foolery!" said Alison, sternly.

"I don't care whether it is or isn't, but you'll have to come," said Jessie.

"I'm very much annoyed," said Alison, sharply. "What do you mean by serving me such a trick? I'm just mad with you!"

"That's right! Then we're all of us mad together, and what could be nicer?" said the incorrigible Jessie, flippantly, but withal looking quite different from her ordinary self.

"I'll tell him I object!" said Alison, with dignity.

"Tut! Tut! Tut! Do you think he'll mind *you!*" asked Jessie, with a touch of sarcasm quite unusual, that irritated Alison almost beyond endurance. She turned away from the bright hazel eyes that were dancing with wild excitement under the brim of Jessie's hat. She was too proud to reply. No girl could well think less of herself than did Alison, but it was one thing to feel nobody, and quite another to be told so by somebody else.

The trap was brought round. Alison offered no protest, but went, feeling in the way, and a good deal hurt.

"A pretty girl is a law to herself, I suppose," said Alison. "Well, they are evi-

dently just engaged, so perhaps they're not accountable for their actions."

For all that, Alison felt disposed to cry when they started, as she sat alone on the back seat.

But kind Mother Nature soon came and consoled her

The sunshine and warmth cheered her; a delightful two hours were before her, in which she should be required neither to speak to any mortal, nor to listen to any, except such of the rural sounds around her as she heard above the grinding of the wheels. This was always a very great treat to Alison.

Her little paper on "Our Border Towers" was published now; its appearance had strangely endeared the neighbourhood to her.

As the ground rose and Mac slackened his speed the landscape below came gradually into her sight.

As each well-known feature appeared, the knowledge she was gazing on the scene perhaps for the last time came to her, and smote her with keen pain. When they stopped at the little toll-house on the highest point of the road, the whole of the dear familiar landscape was visible to her. Down below were the spires of the little town peeping out of thick woods; beyond it, on

one hand the broad Solway, guarded by the dim outlines of English Skiddaw and his attendant hills, hiding the lakes of Cumberland; on the other, the open sea was shining softly in the noontide below—its lovely broken coast-line, stretching far away beyond where great Criffel, the only Scotch mountain all round, confronted sea and land in unchallenged supremacy.

"Oh!" said Alison, gazing down upon it all, "I cannot leave you, my borderland, I cannot leave you, Birrendale," and the tears welled up in her eyes and almost blinded her.

She wanted to make those others stop awhile, and let her gaze on, and take a long farewell; but she felt she could not speak to them then; what was there in common between her and them?

She let them drive on, while she strained her eyes to hold the view, and tried to force her memory to take the impress of the whole beloved scene that in one brief minute would be gone from her, perhaps for ever.

They drove on; the road descended rapidly; the sea, the Solway, Skiddaw, Criffel, all were gone, and the low green border hills appeared, with Mount Agricola, the great mound that looks like an earth-work, raising its square shoulders above their soft curves.

"And I must leave you all, just when I was beginning to know you a little!" said Alison, with tender regret. "How much I might do; I've done scarcely anything yet; I cannot leave you, Birrendale! There's Mount Agricola! How I should like to write about the Roman remains found there! I feel to-day as if I could write about everything I see here, even about those women in the fields. I cannot leave you, Birrendale!" And so all the way along until it seemed like the refrain of some old ballad:

"I cannot leave you, Birrendale!"

And those others, they, too, were learning a song that would haunt them always. They grew silent to listen to it. It made them strangely happy.

That song itself might not be written down by any human hand; but the accompaniment went always:

"Together, forever; forever, together:
Through Birrendale to Allarbie."

Probably they both were thinking of a much longer road; for Mac, when Jessie had asked him to let her drive, had answered vehemently, as he put the reins into her hands: "Here—drive on to the world's end, Jessie."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LIGHT BEYOND THE FIRTH.

THE next day, the last in the old home, Mrs. Bayliss and the girls were tremendously busy; for although the house was now very nearly in order for the new comers, and the bulk of the luggage had been sent away, there were, as there always are, innumerably last details to look after. Ten minutes or so was all Jessie could find for Mac during that day.

But Mac lingered about, ignoring his usual hour of return, and was rewarded by being allowed to row the girls and Mrs. Bayliss over to the cemetery on the other side of the Birren, after having spent much time in gathering flowers for the grave of the late Captain.

He left them at the gates of the cemetery, and waited there for them. There was something in his being allowed even this small share in the family grief that touched and yet was gravely pleasant to him. It gave a sort of reality or rather real-lifelikeness to his engagement with Jessie; while it inspired him

with a reverential awe for the sacredness of affection.

When the sorrowful little group returned, meeting him with sad averted faces, he offered his arm to Mrs. Bayliss with almost filial respect. His own parents had died when he was very young; they were shrouded in a tender mystery.

His ideal of parental and filial affection had consequently never been rudely brought into contact with any unpleasant actual experience.

Mrs. Bayliss had her veil down, but Mac could tell she had been weeping.

He thought that now would be a favourable moment to speak to her of Jessie.

They walked a little way in silence.

At last Mac said, very much under his usually robust voice:

"You must have noticed that I am very fond of Jessie."

"You seem to like to talk to her," said Mrs. Bayliss.

"Her going away is dreadful to me," said Mac, earnestly and simply. "I never felt such a wrench before. It's dreadful!"

"Wrench," was a fortunate word. It went straight to Mrs Bayliss's heart and expressed too well her own feelings.

"It is dreadful!" she sighed.

"I may come and see you when I am in town?" Mac asked.

"Certainly."

"She says she likes me a little," said Mac. "You don't object, I hope? May I sometimes send her a note? She has promised to wait until—that is we are going to be very prudent you know."

"Then you have left off playing?" asked Mrs. Bayliss, as they came to the top of the river bank.

"Let me help you! Playing? I never played! May I write?" said Mac, earnestly.

"If you are quite sure," said Mrs. Bayliss, with an emphasis that coming at that time was not without its pathos.

"I'm never in doubt about these matters, I always know when I hate and when I love, and I know I love Jessie," said Mac, with downright honest fervour.

"It's a very awful thing to say," sighed Mrs. Bayliss.

"Yes, yes, but it's true;" returned Mac, as he handed the widow into the punt, where the swift-footed girls were awaiting them.

Mrs. Bayliss and Alison went up the brae together for the last time. Mac and Jessie lingered on the little stone bridge, beneath

which the burn was still singing its own last song before it lost its identity in the river.

"Oh, Mac!" cried Jessie, clinging to him. "Oh, Mac! I'm going to be very good to you, indeed, indeed I am! I'm going to think of you all day long and every day. Yes, I am! I don't want to go away! Oh, why did you come back and make it so hard for me to go?"

"Darling! Darling! I'll come after you. We won't say good-bye. I shan't be able to stay away from you. You'd draw me to you wherever you were! Jessie don't cry so, love, I can't bear it. I'll come; I'll come almost directly. Oh, when I think what time I've wasted that I might have used in working for you, I could kill myself with rage! but now I'm going to work like a giant, and all for you. It's dreadful waiting here doing nothing! But we're all looking out, something will turn up. It's sure to turn up; but this waiting for work is awful now I've found you; now I know how I shall glory in the worst drudgery for your sake, more than if I had caught all the salmon in all the streams in Scotland! Oh, what a fool I used to be!"

"But all sorts of things may happen?" sighed Jessie. "And I'm so nervous, I've had so much to make me nervous. I'm not strong

like you. But, oh Mac! I'm going to be so good to you! I am, indeed I am!"

And so they talked, and said farewell, with only the woods and the stream to see them. Jessie cried all that night long. The tears ran from under her eyelids and down her face, on to the pillow, and she had not power to stop them.

Then came the last day.

It was wet, cold, grey; but when all was ready for their leaving, the girls ran off into the hill-side garden to try and pluck a few wet flowers to take away with them.

The poor Captain's hats and coats were gone from the hall; when the girls returned, Mac was there waiting to help them in any way he could.

It was too sad to leave the place where so much had been hoped, and suffered, and lost; and—might Mac and Jessie say won?

Presently the mud-besplashed omnibus arrived.

After many delays, at last Mrs. Bayliss and the girls took their places in the ram-shackle vehicle, and Mac went with them.

The lean old horse after a desperate struggle got the omnibus to move; the three women sitting within looked out of the door to see the last of their old home. The sky was grey

above it, the rain was drizzling around it, the firs and spruces looked black and sombre. That was the aspect under which they knew it best, yet how hard, how heart-rending it was to leave it all!

Mac, sitting next to Jessie, took her hand in his and pressed it; but she never turned from the door as long as the firs of Cauldknowe were in sight, although she clutched Mac's hand tightly.

They drove down the wet road to the wet station.

There, there were more farewells and bitter, bitter heartaches.

The heartless train came up and took them away. Mac stood at the extreme end of the platform and watched, with such a horrible pain as he had never felt before, Jessie's face grow dim and formless in the distance, as it turned to him from the window. Jessie watched Mac until the line turned and he was lost.

Then life seemed unbearable.

Ah! that was a wrench, for her, for him, for all of them.

* * * * *

Alison was the first to recover herself.

Her eyes were presently clear enough to see the dead level Solway side.

Then there was a break in the dark rain-clouds. They parted, and rolling back towards Scotland, revealed the Cambrian Skiddaw range beyond the silvery Firth, under a dazzling sunlight that shone out brilliantly through the broadening rift.

"Look, mother, look! The sun is shining on England! It's a happy omen! There's brightness before us. Look up, dearest mother, look up," Alison said, gently touching her mother's arm.

"Your father's grave, dear! Oh, your father's grave!"

"Mother, he isn't there. He'll be as near us all in London," Alison went on, with a little gentle authority. "See, dear, that light is so lovely! It's spreading all over the English border! Here, we've left Gretna, we shall be in England directly, in our own country, in England once more!"

And Alison kept her gaze on the sweet pearly light that shone beyond the Firth, among the lordly English hills, until her own face brightened in sympathy. She needs must greet her native land with a smile.

But Jessie saw no light; she only knew that Mac was left behind.

CHAPTER XV.

"UNDOUBTEDLY THE FINEST SQUARE IN EUROPE."—*John Harbuckle.*

THE Tower of London and its surroundings are so little known to the majority of English people, that I am sure I shall not only be forgiven, but thanked, if I try to make the kind people who may take the trouble to read this narrative understand exactly where they are.

I will assume then that you are all intimate with Charing Cross Station; you have started from it many a time for your wanderings among those foreign cities you know so well.

You have also recrossed the river into Cannon Street; and as your train has passed over the great bridge at the very spot where ancient Britons and Romans once crossed the Thames, you may have noticed, about a mile further down the river, the four turrets of the square White Tower, familiar to you in the wood-cuts of your school books.

It is more than probable that from Cannon

Street Railway Bridge, you have taken your only view of one of the greatest historical monuments of your native land.

Between Cannon Street and the Tower, is the busiest part of the City of London, to you, perhaps, an absolutely unexplored country; although it may be, that, whether you are gentle or simple, some of your own ancestors had their homes in those City streets, worshipped in those City churches, mouldered to dust in those City tombs.

The Tower stands, as it were, at the unquiet limits of the world, as known to London Society. Beyond it are docks, and docks, and docks and wharves; the mysterious regions of Ratcliff, Shadwell, Wapping, Limehouse, haunts of the land shark, the Lascar, and other such like wild fowl.

Further inland lie Whitechapel and the whole of the vast East End.

You may have heard of the East End before; possibly from your friend who organizes charity, or from an art-student, eager to bring beauty to the homes of the poor, or from the patrician amateur musicians who entertain the people, or from one of that most noble band who started the ragged school movement, long before philanthropy became fashionable ("The *H*earl! God bless him!"

as the costers say), or from the promoters of park parties, or from the coffee tavern people, the industrial home people, the temperance people, the sanitary people, the "open spaces" people, the evangelistic people, the ritualistic people, the nursing people, the domestic economy people; for in the East End are the happy hunting grounds, the illimitable fields where the riders of innumerable excellent hobbies find their freest scope.

A few wicked people also roam those boundless prairies of the far East.

The great collection of buildings ancient and modern, grand and shabby, picturesque and prosaic, now known as THE TOWER, stands on the foot and side of a hill that slopes upwards from the north bank of the Thames.

Until within a comparatively recent date it was entirely surrounded by water; on one side by the river, on the others by a deep wide moat; into which people at one time were apt to fall and get drowned on dark or foggy nights.

The moat is dry now. Part of it is used as a drilling ground, part is divided off into miniature kitchen gardens; this last is the side by St. Catherine Docks, which is but little seen by the public, and where much of the barrack washing is dried.

I may here mention that the drying of washing seems to present a great domestic difficulty to the present inmates of the fortress, as they have been driven to run up lines across the roofs of several of the Towers. One may, for instance, often see a string of pennants fluttering in the breeze above the grim, sentry-guarded archway by which the public enter the precincts, or on the top of the Brick Tower, the cold upper rooms of which were the last prison of Walter Raleigh.

Washing, however, is not obliged to be unpicturesque ; indeed it "composes" very well indeed, as has frequently of late years been shown by many a distinguished artist, whose works adorn even our most esoteric collections ; it has also its value as evidence that human beings, as well as historical associations, are living within THE TOWER OF LONDON.

The Tower Gardens, high up upon the wall that flanks the moat, whose form they follow, are, except at the angle facing the Minories, where they broaden into a lawn, merely a strip of grassy bank, running steeply down from the public path that leads over Tower Hill to the Docks. But this grassy bank is so cunningly set with trees that within the Gardens it is almost impossible to believe you are within a few feet of a crowded thorough-

fare. Seen from within those trees the city suggests not London, but Paris, until you turn to the grey weather-stained walls below you, and to the bastions above them, and feel that the four centred turrets they enclose can belong only to the Tower of London.

Beyond the Tower Gardens is a great Square, "incomparably the finest in Europe," as John Harbuckle said; and he ought to be an authority, for he had lived there nearly all his life, and had moreover seen most of the capitals of the Continent.

The Trinity Brethren, that illustrious confraternity, who look after our island's coast and our beacons, have their house on the north side of the square—its white classical façade stands out boldly among the great plane-trees of the square gardens, when you look across from the opposite side.

The gardens of Trinity Square, where now the turf is always of the greenest, cover the spot long occupied by a scaffold, on which, in the days that were earlier, those noblemen and gentlemen whose rank entitled them to the honour, had their heads cut off.

If you really would see the square at its best you must stand some summer evening on the bit of broad pavement in

front of the Trinity House, and look down on the great pile of the Tower and the few masts in a little space of river beside it, all seen, lying in a warm haze, through green waving boughs, with a foreground of turf so cool, so exquisitely kept, right in front of you; see Trinity Square, I repeat, on such an evening, or on a fine spring morning, and I think you will come nigh to allowing that John Harbuckle's verdict was correct.

It was in the north-west angle of this historic square that John Harbuckle himself lived.

For many years that house of his had worn a rather dingy exterior, but towards the end of a certain May fresh window blinds and lace curtains had made their appearance—as had also painted flower-boxes full of geraniums and other blossoms.

What an affair it had been to get the house into some sort of order for the widow and the girls! What an upheaval of all John Harbuckle's feelings, thoughts, and property!

John Harbuckle's intimate friends and acquaintances began to observe a change in that worthy man immediately after his return from Scotland. He lost the placidity that used to be one of his chief characteristics, he grew

nervous, at times irritable, left his gloves and umbrella behind him in shops and in other people's houses, forgot more than once to sign his name to his cheques, bought a new coat in which he was extremely uncomfortable, neglected to read articles that all his friends were discussing, and in short showed signs of being under a new and very disturbing influence.

Towards the end of May this change became more evident; but by that time every one knew that his sister and his nieces were coming to live with him.

Catherine Court saw him rarely, so did the Tower Gardens. As soon as business was over all his time, until far into the night, was now devoted to getting the house into order for his women-folk.

Now this to some men would have been a comparatively easy task, but to John Harbuckle it was an exceedingly difficult and complicated one.

He was not the man to say to Robbins: "Clear out the big room at the top of the house for a den for me; take all my books and papers and other things up to it; arrange the dining-room and drawing-room properly; tell your wife to see that all is ready for the ladies. Put on as much extra help as you want, don't worry me about it until it's

finished. I'll get lodgings out of town while it's being done

This was not at all the way in which John Harbuckle went to work.

John Harbuckle happening to find some well-painted tiles among the furniture with which the drawing-room was crowded, began operations by having them made into window-boxes, the designing and filling of which cost him much anxious thought.

"The girls will be sure to want those oak chests to put their things into," he said next, "so I must have them finished off at once; then of course Mary must have one as well as the girls, so I must look it up. Let me see, in whose catalogue did I notice one? Smith and Jones's? Brown and Robinson's? Ha! I remember, Grey and Green's! so it was! I'll go and have a look at Grey and Green's things. The rooms will all require fresh carpets and curtains, but Mary had better choose them herself; I should be sure to do wrong there. I really must get rid of some of these things. Let me see, there's that French side-board for instance—good example of the style of the first empire. I suppose"—a reluctant sigh—"I suppose that must go. Well, I'll have it done up for the young Thorntons, they'll be glad to have it; but"—with another sigh—"a

really fine example! a fine example! I'd better go and write to Thornton at once, perhaps there's something else he'd fancy; I'll ask him to call." So the letter was written and the answer waited for, and the young husband came, and then he must needs, being but newly wedded, leave matters unsettled until his wife could see the side-board, and then when the wife came, and liked it, she wore a mantle with a fringe that caught in everything, and pulled down a small terra-cotta bust upon one of John Harbuckle's most cherished Wedgewood placques with the Flaxman figures, and shivered Cupid and Pysche, who were whispering together, to atoms.

"I do hope and trust," said John Harbuckle to himself, "that Mary and the girls won't wear fringes."

Young Mrs. Thornton was so distressed at the accident that John Harbuckle was obliged to give the most charming little cup and saucer to console her.

At this rate it naturally took a good while to make the house habitable.

There was very good "picking" left for Mr. and Mrs. Robbins, who furnished comfortable little rooms for themselves out of the material that John Harbuckle gave them, or to which they helped themselves.

As for John Harbuckle's feelings on the eventful day when his visitors were to arrive, they are not to be described. Early in the morning he went down to Billingsgate and then to Leadenhall Market, buying fish, flesh, fowl and fruit, with the greatest care. He had horrible fears that by some means or another Mary and the girls would arrive at some impossible hour long before the dinner was cooked; he could not bring himself to believe that three women could travel from Scotland without something abnormal happening, and when he went off to meet them he had but a faint expectation of finding that they had come by the train specified.

Poor John Harbuckle! The train was a few minutes late; those few minutes were very bad ones to him, as he waited on the platform at Euston, not daring to move from the spot on which he stood, for fear the cabman he had already engaged should play him false at the critical moment, if he did not keep a sharp eye upon him.

As he stood beside the cab, nervously watching for the Scotch train, a local train came in with a good many passengers.

They passed close by him.

He was growing more and more nervous every minute.

Turning his head he caught sight of one of the passengers, a tall, well-made man, leisurely walking away from him.

John Harbuckle rubbed his eyes—the tall man was gone.

"I must be going mad! This is getting too much for my brain! No! no! I'm no seer of ghosts! A quarter of an hour late! What can have happened? But that man! I never saw such a likeness! Ah! here's the train!"

But he never expected to see them all safe and sound.

His surprise was only equaled by his thankfulness when he found them all three unhurt, with the number of their packages complete and not so much as a railway ticket lost.

I am afraid he was, in consequence, over lavish to the guard, feeling that had that functionary not done his duty in an exceptionably able and intelligent manner, those three lady passengers would certainly not have arrived in so fine a state of preservation.

They drove safely down to Tower Hill, and the delightful sense of being in a great capital sent the spirits of the girls up rapidly; but nothing could cheer Mrs. Bayliss.

It was nearly dark when they reached their new home. The entrance seemed cold and

business-like, the broad uncarpeted stairs of the first flight hardly suggested a private dwelling.

But John Harbuckle held back the swing door above that first flight, and showed other stairs, softened with carpets, and a wide landing, where were oriental rugs, and a long window, with festoons of fruit and flowers carved above it, and broad-leaved aspodistræ, and delicate ferns in great blue pots in the window seat, and leading from this pleasant passage, a large, well-lighted dining-room, where the table was covered with shining white napery, bright old-fashioned silver, and where the heavy dinner-waggon bore appliances of more substantial meal than the books and papers it had held not long ago.

It was the same room in which John Harbuckle had been sitting when we first had the pleasure of looking in upon him, only now—to use Janet's expression when she went to put on her afternoon dress—now it had been "sorted."

"My dear Mary, I am truly glad you are all with me at last!" said John Harbuckle, "very truly glad!"

"Thank you," said Mary, coldly. "You have made the place look better than I expected to find it."

"It's quite lovely!" said Alison, gazing round with pleasure. "And you haven't taken all the books away! That is good of you!"

"Well, well," said her uncle, nervously, "go and get your bonnets off. Make haste, don't keep Mrs. Robbins waiting, I'm afraid we're late already."

So putting themselves under the guidance of a niece of Mrs. Robbins's, who had come in to help, they went upstairs, to a couple of large rooms, of wonderful and spotless cleanliness, each containing a venerable "four-poster," and after a hasty toilet came down again.

Mrs. Robbins had indeed done her best; she heaped coals of fire without stint on John Harbuckle's ungrateful head. Down to its smallest detail that meal was delicious. It propitiated even Mrs. Bayliss.

"For I must admit," she said, "that there is no comparison between the eatables in London and what you can get elsewhere; and after all, it is very pleasant to have dinners in which everything is nice."

"Ah it is!" sighed John Harbuckle, and if his conscience reproved him on the score of Mrs. Robbins, a foreboding that he felt was but too well founded, told him that the dinners he would have at his own table in which every-

thing would be very nice were destined henceforth to be few and very far between.

You won't think the worse of my two girls if I tell you that they most thoroughly enjoyed that dinner, and declared that everything had a much better flavour in London than anywhere else; in which verdict, I think, most people will concur?

"Even birds of Paradise peck a little now and then;" and my girls were but mortals who felt that three hundred miles was a long distance to come in one day.

John Harbuckle slept but indifferently that night, so anxious was he about his guests, but whenever he dropped off he was haunted by a tall man, who smoked a cigar, the thing of all others John Harbuckle detested. When he awoke he had a horrible dread come over him that someone was going to steal Jessie from him; not his Jessie of Catherine Court, but that hazel-eyed girl whose voice was so like the voice he had heard from the man in the cab; it was not Mac Carruthers he feared.

END OF VOL. I.

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